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THE ACHIEVEMENT OF JOHN GOWER:
A Reading of the Confessio Amantis

by

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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Comparative Literature in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York.

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INTRODUCTION

"MORAL GOWER"

Chaucer dedicated Troilus and Criseyde to "Moral Gower" and "Philosophical Strode" and in so doing collaborated, not by intent, but by the ironies of history, in establishing the image of Gower as an obtrusive and intolerable moralizer. Chaucer, of course, was not responsible for the connotations of smugness that the label eventually assumed. He meant it as a compliment, and one of the highest he could conceive. For, as Fisher has shown in his analysis of Chaucer's use of the term, the epithet meant expert in the principles of human conduct.[1] The studies of Coffman, Fisher and others have amply demonstrated the depth and comprehensiveness of Gower's moral concerns.[2] These studies have also reinforced the notion that Gower's moral earnestness is expressed in a form that most readers, especially those interested in poetry, would find indigestible. While clarifying what Chaucer meant by the term

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[1] John H. Fisher, John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer (New York, 1964), pp. 225-226.

[2] George R. Coffman, "John Gower in His Most Significant Role," U. of Colorado Studies, Ser. B, II, No. 4, 1945, pp. 52-61, and "John Gower, Mentor for Royalty: Richard II," PMLA, LXIX (1954), pp. 953-64; Arthur B. Ferguson, The Articulate Citizen and the English Renaissance (Durham, 1965); G. Stillwell, "Gower and the Last Years of Edward III," SP, XLV (1948), pp. 454-471; Maria Wickert, Studien zu John Gower (Köln, 1953).

"moral" they have confirmed the apparent validity of its modern connotations.

Chaucer's interpretation of Gower in the dedication was based on Gower's first two major works, the Mirour de l'Omme and the Vox Clamantis. The ordinary reader who has any acquaintance with Gower is likely to know him through the Confessio Amantis, his third major work, apparently begun after the completion of Chaucer's Troilus. However, modern interpretations of Gower as primarily a moralist are based largely on the two early works. This is not to say that the Confessio is ignored. On the contrary, since Macaulay's rediscovery of the Mirour the assumption of the unity and continuity of Gower's oeuvre has formed the basis for a whole tradition of scholarly investigation. Mlle. Fowler states the principle with conviction:

> J'aurais voulu me restreindre a l'étude du Mirour de l'Omme, mais en lisant et surtout en étudiant les notes de M. Macaulay, je me suis rendu compte qu'un travail qui n'envisagerait pas les trois poèmes en bloc n'aurait pas une utilité durable. Ces derniers forment une trilogie dont chaque partie se dégage mal des deux autres...[3]

The view of the three works as a trilogy is supported by impressive evidence based on thematic, structural, and other similarities. It was the remarkable consistency in style and substance of Gower's works that enabled Macaulay to identify so easily and so positively the Mirour.

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[3] R. Elfreda Fowler, Une Source francaise des poèmes de Gower (Macon, 1905), p. 12.

> It is only when we institute a comparison between the Mirour and the two other principal works, in Latin and English respectively, which our author used as vehicles for his serious thoughts, that we realize how impossible it is that the three should not all belong to one author. Gower was in fact a man of stereotyped convictions, whose thoughts on human society and on the divine government of the world tended constantly to repeat themselves in but slightly varying forms. What he said in one language he was apt to repeat in another, as may be seen, even if we leave the Mirour out of sight, by comparison of the Confessio Amantis with the Vox Clamantis.[4]

Macaulay pointed out the Mirour's parallel with the Confessio's treatment of the sins, and the Vox's treatment of the orders of society.[5] He also showed that what is said about the sins and the classes of society is substantially the same in all these works. The Mirour contains a number of stories most of which are retold in the Confessio with a similar application. In addition, a substantial number of identical anecdotes and emblems of natural history and literary quotations are found in all three poems; frequently "adduced in the same connexion and sometimes grouped together in the same order."[6] Other linkings reveal

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[4] G. C. Macaulay (ed), The Complete Works of John Gower, in four volumes: Vol. I, French Works; Vols. II and III, English works; Vol. IV, Latin works (Oxford, 1899-1902), Vol. I, p. xxxvi. All references to Gower's works are to this edition. References to the French works are given by line number. References to the Confessio and Vox Clamantis by book and line. Translations from the Latin works are from The Major Latin Works of John Gower, translated by E. W. Stockton (Seattle, 1962).

[5] Ibid., pp. xxxiv-xli.

[6] Ibid., p. xxxix.

themselves with inspection and, joined to the extensive amount of identical material, contribute to the impression of a consciously-wrought and significant relationship among the works. For example, Gower changed the French Mirour to Speculum in an apparent effort to align all three titles. Themes shared by the Mirour and Vox, such as the corruption of man, society, and the natural world, and a concern with the qualities and duties of the king, are restated in the Prologue and Book VII of the Confessio.

Few scholars would now accept Macaulay's view that Gower was simply repeating himself. There is agreement that, despite repetition, each work makes significant gains in depth and comprehensiveness. Nevertheless, the precedent Macaulay established by emphasizing the similarity and unity of the three works has been influential, almost decisive for subsequent scholarship. The guiding principle of this scholarship, a commitment to see Gower's work as a whole, is both sound in theory and admirable in intent. Application of the principle, however, has been faulty and the results have been misleading. Comparisons have stressed the similarities in themes and ideational content among the three works. Intellectually Gower is cautious and conservative. Speculative philosophy is not his forte. His caution makes the possibility of a dramatic break, shift, or contradiction in intellectual position unlikely. It gives a consistency to his work that, as long as one

is focusing only on the explicitly stated ideas, powerfully reinforces the temptation to see the Confessio as at most a restatement and development of the Mirour and Vox.

Macaulay was responsive to the aesthetic qualities of the Confessio. No one would deny that the Confessio is more readable than its predecessors. Yet the stress on the similarities has effectively denied the individuality of the Confessio and heavily reinforced the impression that Gower was incapable of rising above endless and explicit didacticism. It puts the Confessio on the same artistic level as the Mirour and Vox and consequently treats the poetry of the Confessio as negligible.

The problem of the relationship of the Confessio to Gower's other works is crucial. It is also a delicate and deceptive question. It cannot be answered by focusing on broad thematic and doctrinal similarities. This procedure ignores those areas peculiar to poetry - attitude, weight, felt experience, intuitive apprehension. Yet it is precisely in these areas that the gap between the Confessio and its predecessors is located and it is these elements that qualify everything Gower has previously said. Moreover, to stress the similarities is to ignore Gower's own assertions, (cited below) made in the Prologue and Book I, of the uniqueness of the Confessio. These statements are significant for a number of reasons, but the most

important for our immediate purpose is that they articulate the difference between the Confessio and Gower's previous major works in terms of the crucial issue of didacticism.

Certainly the taste, or professed taste, for didacticism was stronger in the Middle Ages than in our time. But the intensity of this appetite must not be exaggerated. If St. Paul could put a member of his audience to sleep there is no reason to doubt the ability of a medieval preacher to do the same. The distinction between, or more accurately, incompatibility of, didacticism and art has been a tenet of modern aesthetic theory since the Romantic movement. The distinction is not as sharp in preceding centuries nor the belief in the irreconcilability of the two as adamant. Nevertheless the issue is old, going back to Plato. The conflict troubled the church fathers, including Augustine, and is evident in a persistent ambivalence toward books throughout the Middle Ages. This conflict appears in aesthetically charming form almost a century before the Confessio in The Owl and the Nightingale. Gower's didacticism was deeply ingrained, reinforced by the taste of his age, and resurgent after the Confessio. Nevertheless, Gower, as well as his readers, knew the difference between a sermon and a tale and was aware of the limitations of the former. Gower's awareness is evident in the Prologue to the Confessio:

Bot for men sein, and soth it is,
That who that al of wisdom writ
It dulleth ofte a mannes wit
To him that schal it aldai rede,
For thilke cause, if that ye rede,
I wolde go the middel weie
And wryte a bok betwen the tweie,
Somewhat of lust, somewhat of lore,
That of the lasse or of the more
Som man mai lyke of that I wryte.
(Pro. 11)

Despite their considerable virtues it would be difficult to deny that both the Mirour and the Vox have a tendency in large doses to "dullen ofte a mannes wit." In the beginning of Book I Gower registers his awareness of the futility of unadulterated moralism, perhaps of the vanity of hoping to reform the world through books:

I may noght strecche up to the hevene
Min hand, ne setten al in evene
This world, which evere is in balance:
It stant noght in my sufficance
So grete thinges to compasse,
Bot I mot lete it overpasse
And treten upon othre thinges.
Forthi the Stile of my writinges
Fro this day forth I thenke change
And speke of thing is noght so strange,
Which every kinde hath upon honde,
And wherupon the world mot stonde,
And hath don sithen it began,
And schal whil ther is any man;
And that is love, of which I mene
To trete, as after schal be sene.
(I, 1)

These two passages assert that the Confessio will be distinguished by a new topic, a new method, and a new purpose. The new topic is love, a subject not as alien (and alienating) as the social, political and moral

abstractions that formed the subject matter of his preceding works. It is not, however, trivial, not indeed, unrelated to the preceding works. Gower is not writing escape literature. He is, on the contrary, preparing to deal with something of fundamental importance "wherupon the world mot stonde." A new subject requires a new technique. He is going to change both his style and manner of handling his material. Finally, he is writing with a new purpose. He will no longer write with the intent to effect immediate and practical changes in the world.

This is as plain and direct a literary manifesto as we will find in a period in which literary theory and criticism as we understand them were virtually nonexistent. It is possible that in his life time Gower's reputation depended on his moral treatises. However, after having written two substantial moral and social critiques which in size, gravity, specificity, and comprehensiveness seem motivated by the assumption that it was in fact possible to "reach up to heaven" and to "setten al in evene this world" he turns to an entirely new project. He undertakes to write a poem on love for the most demanding and discriminating audience of experts on the genre that his age could provide. The sympathetic reception given to the poem is due to Gower's at least

partial success in fulfilling his declared intention.[7] Exactly what Gower meant in his declaration and the extent to which he fulfilled it will emerge from this study. He claims to be undertaking something new. It is a claim that should be taken seriously.

My primary purpose in this study will be to establish the nature of Gower's poetic achievement in the Confessio. This achievement has been blurred by critical insistence on bracketing it with the totality of his work. If this study is successful it should clarify the relationships among Gower's works. Since it is the nature of the Confessio and not these relationships in themselves that is my principal concern, I have not attempted to give an exhaustive account of Gower's use of the mass of material referred to above as common to the three works. Such a procedure would be clumsy and the result, I suspect, unreadable.

Perhaps I can make my purpose clearer by restating the central critical problem of the Confessio in terms of the relationships of the three works. Gower presents himself

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[7]For Gower's reputation see Fisher, Chapter I. There are forty-nine extant manuscripts of the Confessio, ten of the Vox, and only one of the Mirour de l'Omme. But it was the Confessio that was anthologized during the 15th century and printed by Caxton and it was as a master of English poetry that Gower was admired and linked with Chaucer by subsequent generations. The artistic superiority of the Confessio to the Mirour and Vox is one of the few points of universal agreement among modern scholars.

to us in two guises -- moralist and love poet. We would not expect either role ever to be entirely suppressed. The moralist dominates both the Mirour and the Vox, but even in these works the poet makes his presence felt. The relationship of the two in the Confessio is more difficult to define. The Confessio does contain aesthetically unassimilated material. For stretches we could define the relationship between the two as one of co-existence. However, on the whole, Gower manages to go beyond mere co-existence, achieving a genuine fusion of the two roles. The obtrusive preacher with a "palpable design upon us" has been replaced by Gower the mature artist engaged in fashioning an authentic poetic vision. This Gower, however, is as deserving of the title "moral" as the Gower of the Mirour and the Vox. However, he makes his presence felt here in a pervasive concern with moral issues which gives depth and weight to the imaginative vision, evident in plot, character, and the very substance of Amans' tale.

In Chapter I, I deal directly with representative examples of the mass of material common to the three works to show that Gower consistently and successfully attempted in the Confessio to use for imaginative and artistic purposes material that previously had been treated in a purely didactic fashion. On the basis of this analysis I offer a new if partial explanation for the recurrence

of vast amounts of material in all three works.

Chapter II deals with the tales. In part I, I attempt to show that Gower's interest in Ovid's Metamorphoses is rooted in his belief in the interdependence of man and nature, his moral concerns, his conviction of the ultimate benignity of nature, and a genuine response to myth. Part II treats a selection of tales in which Gower's psychological interest is shown to be based on a fascination with a character's fundamental moral commitments and the personal and social consequences of these commitments under pressure.

Chapter III is concerned with Amans, the nature of his passion, the moral core of the art of love taught him by Genius, the important question of Amans as a persona and its implications for an understanding of the unique position of the Confessio within Gower's work, and Amans' place in the structure of the poem.

Chapter IV discusses Gower's philosophy of love in the light of the preceding chapters and gives an analysis of the poem's conclusion. It attempts first to show that Gower does have something new and important to say about love, and then to draw some conclusions about Gower's achievement in the Confessio and its place within his total oeuvre.

Chapter V offers a new view of the relationship of Chaucer and Gower based on the recognition that each inhabits a unique poetic world.

In attempting to define my approach to the Confessio I have perhaps given the impression that the bracketing of the Confessio with the didactic works has received universal acceptance among modern scholars. This is obviously untrue. As a critical platform it has been the basis of only one line of scholarly development. This line has, however, been decisive if opinions widely expressed in literary histories and summaries of scholarship can be taken to represent a prevailing consensus. The culminating product of this tradition is the study of John Fisher which argues that Gower's real significance is in his role as a social and moral critic. Fisher's study is widely referred to as "definitive." It is impossible to evaluate Gower without coming to terms with Fisher, and consequently, references to him are frequent in this work. Indeed, my thesis might be interpreted as a response to the tradition of which he is the culminating representative. In fairness, therefore, I should say that in addition to negative stimulus Fisher's study has been a treasury of invaluable factual material.

All admirers of the Confessio owe an incalculable debt to C. S. Lewis' appreciation of Gower in the Allegory of Love which is still the best single piece on the poem.[8]

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[8](New York, 1958).

Peter Fison[9] and Derek Pearsall[10] have both lodged eloquent protests against the general failure to take C. S. Lewis' revaluation of Gower seriously. J. A. W. Bennett's suggestive introduction to his selection from Gower's writings has been very valuable in formulating my interpretation of the Confessio.[11] J. H. Burrow's Ricardian Poetry appeared too late to be consulted for this thesis. However, his view of Gower is consistent with mine.[12] All of these critics have rejected the bracketing of the Confessio with the remainder of Gower's work. However, as far as I know, no admirer of the Confessio has attempted to redefine the relationship or put into relief the excellence of the Confessio by analyzing Gower's re-shaping of material taken from earlier works.[13] I hope to provide decisive confirmation of what Gower's admirers have always sensed intuitively -- the uniqueness of his poetic achievement in the Confessio.

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[9] "The Poet in John Gower," EIC, VIII (1958), pp. 16-20.

[10] "Gower's Narrative Art," PMLA, LXXXI (1966), pp. 475-484.

[11] Selections from John Gower (Oxford, 1968).

[12] (London, 1971)

[13] Father J. B. Dwyer's unpublished doctoral dissertation, The Tradition of Medieval Manuals of Religious Instruction in the Poems of John Gower (Chapel Hill, 1950), is sometimes credited with having demonstrated that the Confessio is an artistic synthesis of materials taken from manuals of religious instruction. It is, however, virtually confined to a study of the relationship of this tradition to the Mirour.

CHAPTER I

"LORE" IN THE CONFESSIO

The large quantity of material common to the Mirour, Vox, and Confessio, first documented in Macaulay's introductions, has formed the basis of virtually every comprehensive study of Gower. However, determined to demonstrate the continuity of content and intention of Gower's three major poems, the authors of these studies have consistently overlooked a possible explanation for the existence of this shared material. This possibility, which while simple also indicates a much closer relationship between the Confessio and its predecessors than has been generally recognized, is simply that the Mirour and to a lesser extent the Vox are among the important direct sources of the Confessio. The related passages, arguments, and figures of speech are certainly too numerous to be accidental. One of Macaulay's examples of shared quotations hints at the actual degree of intimacy.

> Three quotations referred to 'Orace' occur in the Mirour, and of these two reappear in the Confessio with the same author's name (Mir. 3801, 10948, 23370, Conf. Am. vi 1513, vii 3581). Now of these two, one as it happens, is from Ovid and the other from Juvenal; so that not only the quotations but also the

> false references are repeated. These are not by any means all the examples of common quotations, but they will perhaps suffice.[14]

That Gower had the Mirour beside him as he composed the Confessio is supported by Macaulay's description of the similarities between Gower's French and English.[15] These resemblances are especially significant in view of the seven year gap between the completion of the Mirour and the commencement of the Confessio.

While I am convinced that Gower did use the Mirour in composing the Confessio, proving that he did so is not my primary concern. However, it would be well to recall a fundamental limitation on the purposes and usefulness of source studies since it has been so widely ignored in regard to the Confessio. A source can never tell us the meaning of a new work even though a comparison of the final product with its original can tell us much of value. The meaning of the Confessio must be found in the Confessio. It cannot be transferred over wholesale from an alleged original even if that original is one of Gower's own works. This caution is especially relevant to Gower because, from the few source studies

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[14] Works, I, p. xxxix.

[15] Ibid., p. xl.

that have been made, it is evident that even in his early works he handles his material with a great deal of freedom.[16]

The Mirour, from which the bulk of the material to be discussed has been drawn, does contain genuine poetry. Macaulay is careful to point out that even though Gower took as a model the practical devotional manual, the Mirour is not one. It "is a literary production, or at least aspires to that character."[17] Nevertheless, no one, including his most enthusiastic admirers, has yet argued that in the Mirour Gower successfully reconciled the roles of preacher and poet, and I believe that Macaulay's final judgment on Gower's performance in this poem will stand.

> In fact, he is a poet in a different sense altogether from his predecessors, superior to former Anglo-Norman writers both in imagination and in technical skill; but at the same time he is hopelessly unreadable, so far as this book as a whole is concerned, because having been seized by the fatal desire to do good in his generation, 'villicacionis sue racionem, dum tempus instat, ... alleuiare cupiens,' as he himself expresses it, he deliberately determined to smother those gifts which had been employed in the service of folly, and to become a preacher instead of a poet, ... he remains a preacher, and not a very good one after all.[18]

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[16]Father Paul E. Beichner, "Gower's Use of Aurora in Vox Clamantis," Speculum, XXX (1955), pp. 582-595.

[17]Works, I, xlviii.

[18]Ibid., p. lvi.

The poem is rich in similes, metaphors, and exempla. But amplificatio dominates all so that even the vivid and potentially illuminating figure loses its effectiveness in the crowd. The elaborate symmetrical subdivisions by which the poem is organized cannot dispel the reader's feeling of moving through a vast seamless continuum. A description of one branch of a sin is preceded and followed by descriptions of other branches treated in passages of identical style, texture, and intent. Humor is totally absent. There are no surprises, no illuminating contrasts, no shifts in tone. These are traits particularly prized by modern readers. However, they are not exclusively modern, but are perfectly consistent with medieval aesthetics. They abound in Chaucer's works. Most importantly of all, as I will try to demonstrate below, they enrich the Confessio and probably explain the fact that it was more popular than either the Mirour or Vox.

The examples discussed have been selected on the basis of their self-evident relationship to the Mirour and Vox and presented in order to illustrate the variety of uses to which Gower puts them. All pertain to the seven deadly sins. Since this is the principal structural device in the Mirour and the Confessio as well as an important one in the Vox, it subsumes most of the material

classifiable as lore and an analysis of it should give us a reliable picture of Gower's aims and methods. Both have shifted dramatically in the Confessio. This shift is largely achieved by a wholesale alteration in context. Since in the Confessio any particular passage is integrally related to the pattern of story, confession, story, citation of the whole context would obviously be awkward. The extreme length of even the smallest subdivision in the Mirour makes reproduction of the immediate sub-context of a passage even more unfeasible. I have quoted where possible. But even extensive paraphrasing has not been able to eliminate the need for the somewhat clumsy expedient of citing line totals.

In his discussion of vanity in the Mirour, Gower has a passage expressing regret for past indulgences in singing and caroling.

> Jadis trestout m'abandonoie
> Au foldelit et veine joye,
> Dont ma vesture desguisay
> Et les fols ditz d'amours fesoie,
> Dont en chantant je carolloie:
> Mais ore je m'aviseray
> Et tont cela je changeray,
> Enners dieu je supplieray
> Q'il de sa grace me convoie:
> Ma conscience accuseray,
> Un autre chancon chanteray
> Que jadys chanter ne soloie.
> (27337)

This passage is of interest for a number of reasons and has been referred to for its relevance to the development

of Gower's attitude toward courtly love and poetry as well as for biographical speculation. These issues will be dealt with later. What is of immediate interest is a passage in the Confessio in which Genius cites singing, caroling, and dancing as examples of vainglorious behavior:

> Lich unto the Camelion
> Which upon every sondri hewe
> That he beholt he moste newe
> His colour, and thus unavised
> Fulofte time he stant desguised.
> Mor jolif than the brid in Maii
> He makth him evere freissh and gay,
> And doth al his array desguise,
> So that of him the newe guise
> Of lusti folk alle othre take;
> And ek he can carolles make,
> Rondeal, balade and virelai.
> And with al this, if that he may
> Of love gete him avantage,
> Anon he wext of his corage
> So overglad, that of his ende
> Him thenkth ther is no deth comende:
> For he hath thanne at alle tide
> Of love such a maner pride,
> Him thenkth his joie is endeles.
> (I, 2700)

Looking at the passage from the Mirour we might admire Gower's prosodic competence and recall the achievement of his trilingual fluency. It accurately captures a penitential tone, but, perhaps because of this, as poetry it is not likely to tempt us to linger. The different tone of the passage from the Confessio is reflected in the vigor of the verse and language. The French is devoid of similes. The English has two. In the French Gower has repressed his usual fascination

with motion. In the Confessio he has unleashed it so that the whole passage reflects a youth propelled by boundless energy.

Doctrinally the two passages are perfectly consistent. Yet Gower conveys something in the Confessio that is unapproached in the selection from the Mirour. The French text contains a traditional if gratuitous (for the modern reader) condemnation of certain harmless pastimes. The passage in the Confessio is less directed at condemning these activities than at establishing their connection with the refusal to recognize death. Singing and dancing as such are not wrong. Acting as if there were no death is. This is asserted in two passages which frame the description proper:

> The proude vice of veine gloire
> Remembreth noght of purgatoire,
> Hise worldes joyes ben so grete,
> Him thenkth of hevene no beyete.
> (I, 2681)

> Anon he wext of his corage
> So overglad, that of his ende
> Him thenkth ther is no deth comende:
> For he hath thanne at alle tide
> Of love such a maner pride,
> Him thenkth his joie is endeles.
> (I, 2712)

Whatever we think of dancing and caroling the notion of the obliviousness to death conveys force and conviction. In the Mirour caroling, dancing, singing and display are examples of vainglorious behavior to be avoided per se. In the Confessio these activities are

used to construct a personification of the abstraction "vainglory" which is summed up in one fine example of hyperbole:

> I trow, if that he myhte make
> His body newe, he wolde take
> A newe forme and leve his olde.
> (I, 2691)

Certainly this is not great poetry. But it is obviously a great improvement over the Mirour and an example of fine, vigorous writing by a confident and trained craftsman.

As "lore" this passage is effective and even approaches self-sufficiency. Of course neither it nor its analogue is actually self-sufficient. Both are firmly fixed in a context which is as important in determining their meaning and effectiveness as the quality of the language. In the Mirour, the twenty lines under discussion form the conclusion of a 750-line section devoted to a catalogue of the sins of all the estates and their vain efforts to excuse themselves. The narrator puts himself forth as an example of someone who is willing to accept responsibility and calls upon his readers to join him in a song of repentance. The purpose is purely didactic, a purpose supported by the immediate context and the 27,000 preceding verses of similar tone, style, and content. The monolithic character of this context largely cancels whatever force

any particular passage, including the one under discussion, might be capable of generating.

What in the Mirour is part of a long homogeneous section, embracing a series of related topics, in the Confessio is a short passage restricted to one subject, vainglory, and in distinct contrast to its context. This contrast heightens its intrinsic value as lore. However, an examination of the context indicates that "lore" is not the matter of ultimate concern but is only one element in a more comprehensive unity. It is part of a dialogue in which Amans is forced to confess that he is indeed guilty of the sin of vainglory.

> Mi fader, as touchinge of al
> I may noght wel ne noght ne schal
> Of veine gloire excuse me,
> That I ne have for love be
> The betre adresced and arraied;
> And also I have ofte assaied
> Rondeal, balade and virelai
> For hire on whom myn herte lai
> To make, and also forto peinte
> Caroles with my wordes qweinte,
> To sette my pourpos aloft.
> (I, 2721)

His confession of guilt is the introduction to an ironic, whimsical description of his difficulties in courting. All his efforts are in vain:

> Thus was my gloire in vein beset
> Of al the joie that I made,
> For whanne I wolde with hire glade,
> And of hire love songes make,
> Sche saide it was noght for hir sake,
> And liste noght my songes hiere
> Ne witen what the wordes were.
> (I, 2736)

This passage reflects the tiny and perfect precision of Gower's artistry as Amans dwells on his lady's rejection of his love songs and as his sensitive ego remembers three distinctly different levels of rebuff. There is only a glimmer of the lady's personality but the memory of her refusal of him as lover and poet preserves the sting of a genuine encounter. Obviously, pure didacticism, i.e., a warning against vainglory, is not the primary theme of this exchange. The Confessor's statement does not lack force but it is qualified. It nc longer stands alone as an authoritative ex cathedra pronouncement. The form of Amans' response is evidence of Gower's rhetorical training, but the reply is not mere rhetoric. The very expressions that serve Genius as a means of representing an abstract moral principle are used in the responding passage to construct a charming, touching portrayal of courtship. The lover's self-portrait is not a simple mirror-image of the Confessor's ideas. It reflects back a human reality which does not quite match the abstraction. Surely if the vitality and charm of the lover's confession do not undercut Genius, they qualify his solemnity and tendency toward pomposity. I am not suggesting that it would be profitable for the reader to pore over the passage in an effort to tease out various types of ambiguity. I am suggesting that Genius' statement and the

lover's response form an integrated unity that is the product of a sophisticated, delicate artistry.

These conclusions are confirmed by an analysis of the presentation in the Confessio of earlier statements concerning the profession of arms. In both the Mirour and Vox Gower expresses conventional ideals and criticisms of the order.

> Si vous vuiletz que je vous die
> L'estat de la chivalerie,
> Ce n'est pas un estat de nient
> Ainz cil q'en tient la droite vie
> Selonc que l'ordre est establie
> Molt grant honour a luy partient:
> Car chivaler, u qu'il devient,
> De son devoir le droit sustient
> Dont sainte eglise est enfranchie
> Ou si tirant le droit detient
> Du vierge ou vieve, lors covient
> Que chivaler leur face aie.
> (23593)

The basic function of a knight is to safeguard "le commun droit". However, the estate as a whole is corrupt and now finds its principal motivation in pride, booty, ransom, trade, and lust.

> O chivaler, je t'en dirray
> Tu qui travailles a l'essay
> Devers Espruce et Tartarie.
> La cause dont tu vas ne say,
> Trois causes t'en diviseray,
> Les deux ne valont une alie:
> La primere est, si j'ensi die
> De ma prouesce enorguillie,
> 'Pour loos avoir je passeray';
> Ou autrment, 'C'est pour m'amye,
> Dont puiss avoir sa druerie,
> Et pour ce je travailleray.'
> O chivaler, savoir porras,
> Si tu pour tiete cause irras,
> Que je t'en vois cy divisant,

L'essample point ne suieras,
Ne d'armes ceaux resembleras,
Des queux tu m'as oy contant:
Car nul puet estre bien vaillant,
S'il dieu ne mette a son devant;
...
Si tu d'orguil voes travailler
Pour vaine gloire seculer,
Dont soietz le superiour
Des autres, los t'estuet donner.
(23893)

The Vox adds a criticism of Christian chivalry's failure to retake Jerusalem from the Pagans:

> The lineal descent by right of His mother proclaims Christ as the heir of the land in which He was born. If any of this world ought to be our property, it should be Christ's part, which is made over to Him by legal title. But a pagan interloper holds it now, and he pays no tribute into our treasury for it. But we do not carry on war against these men by attacking either their persons or their property. Our law is silent about this. No bull admonishes us about this, and no sweeping condemnation spurs us on. Nor does our sword do battle ... Instead we are fighting open battles over worldly possessions with our brothers, whom the water of baptism indicates as reborn.
> (III, 660)[19]

Elsewhere it repeats the criticisms made in the Mirour, with special emphasis on the need for a knight to avoid

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[19] Linea natalis matris de iure fatetur
Heredem Cristum, qua fuit ortus, humi:
Si quid in hoc mundo nobis proprium magis esset,
Pars foret hoc Cristi que titulatur ei:
Hanc tenet intrusor modo set paganus, ab illa
Thesauris nostris nulla tributa feret.
Nos neque personas neque res repetendo mouemus
Bella viris istis, lex ibi nostra silet:
Non ibi bulla monet, ibi nec sentencia lata
Aggrauat, aut gladius prelia noster agit:
...
Set magis in fratres signat quos vnda renator,
Pro mundi rebus public bella damus.
(III, 650)

the perils of love. However, justly motivated, feats of arms may bring a worthy woman as a reward.

> When a Knight stands before nearby enemies like a partridge does (before) a hawk, his action is shameful. The man whom Mars' glorious feats of arms do not delight cannot be worthy of Rachel's embraces....Let no man be loved who is unworthy of love, and let the man lack love who refuses its responsibility.[20]
> (V, 530)

Genius also has an opinion on the profession of arms:

> Forthi who secheth loves grace,
> Wher that these worthi wommen are,
> He mai noght thanne himselve spare
> Upon his travail forto serve,
> Wherof that he mai thonk deserve,
> There as these men of Armes be,
> Somtime over the grete Se:
> So that be londe and ek be Schipe
> He mot travaile for worschipe
> And make manye hastyf rodes,
> Somtime in Prus, somtime in Rodes,
> And somtime into Tartarie;
> So that these heraldz on him crie;
> 'Vailant, vailant, lo where he goth!'
> And thanne he yifth hem gold and cloth,
> So that his fame mihte springe,
> And to his ladi Ere bringe
> Som tidinge of his worthinesse;
> So that sche miht of his prouesce
> Of that sche herde men recorde,
> The betre unto his love acorde
> And danger pute out of hire mod,
> Whanne alle men recorden good,
> And that sche wot wel, for hir sake
> That he no travail wol forsake.
> (IV, 1620)

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[20] Hostibus vt perdix vicinis ancipiterque
Miles dum steterit, res sibi vilis erit.
Non valet hic dignus amplexibus esse Rachelis,
Inclita quem Martis arma beare negant:
...
Nullus ametur homo qui non est dignus amore,
Sit set amoris egens qui negat eius onus:
(V, 520)

It is impossible not to note the references to "Prus" and "Tartarie" in the English and French texts. The reader who has spent some time with the Mirour might also have noted the similarity between the line, "Vailant, vailant, lo, wher he goth!" and a description of a joust elsewhere in the Mirour where "tons criont, 'Vaillant! Vaillant!" (11694). It is, however, possible that these were common catch phrases and therefore in themselves prove nothing. Also Genius, appropriately enough in a work devoted to love, omits all reference to looting and other mundane motivations. The common element is the notion of love as an incitement to knightly deeds. In our discussion of vainglory we pointed out that Genius' sentiments harmonized with their prototypes in the moral treatises. In this example, however, Genius advises Amans to follow a course of action condemned in the Mirour as the cause of contemporary chivalry's corruption. Obviously, we are in a radically different imaginative world.

Genius' statement serves as a prefix to Amans' reply, which confirms the difference. When asked if he has been idle in the exercise of knightly deeds Amans answers with an immediate and unabashed yes.

> My fader ye, and evere was:
> For as me thenketh trewely
> That every man doth mor than I
> As of this point, and if so is
> That I have oght so don er this,

It is so litel of acompt,
As who seith, it mai noght amonte
To winne of love his lusti yifte.
For this I telle you in schrifte,
That me were levere hir love winne
Than Kaire and al that is ther inne;
And forto slen the hethen alle,
I not what good ther mihte falle,
So mochel blod thogh ther be schad.
This finde I writen, hou Crist bad
That noman other scholde sle.
What scholde I winne over the Se,
If I mi ladi loste at hom?
Bot passe thei the salte fom,
To whom Crist bad thei scholden preche
To al the world and his feith teche:
Bot now thei rucken in here nest
And resten as hem liketh best
In all the swetnesse of delices.
Thus thei defenden ous the vices,
And sitte hemselven al amidde;
To slen and feihten thei ous bidde
Hem whamthei scholde, as the bok seith,
Converten unto Cristes feith.
Bot hierof have I gret mervaile,
Hou thei wol bidde me travaile:
A Sarazin if I sle schal,
I sle the Soule forth withal,
And that was nevere Cristes lore.
Bot nou ho ther, I seie nomore.
(IV, 1648)

He reiterates his practical objection to adventuring.

What scholde I thenne go so ferr
In strange londes many a mile
To ryde, and lese at hom therwhile
Mi love? It were a schort beyete
To winne chaf and lese whete.
(IV, 1705)

If, however, he thought such deeds would impress his lady he surely would perform them.

Bot if mi ladi bidde wolde,
That I for hire love scholde
Travaile, me thenkth trewely
I miht fle thurghout the Sky,
And go thurghout the depe Se.
(IV, 1711)

He argues that even though he has not taken up sword and shield he has not therefore been guilty of idleness in love. However, all his efforts have been in vain.

> The more besinesse I leie,
> The more that I knele and preie
> With goode wordes and with softe,
> The more I am refused ofte,
> With besinesse and mai noght winne.
> (IV, 1747)

Genius counsels patience and promises to commend the lover to Venus for his industriousness. He then proposes to tell the tale of Nauplus and Ulysses to illustrate.

> Whan that knyhthode schal be werred
> Lust mai noght thanne be preferred
> The bedd mot thanne be forsake
> And Schield and spere on honde take,
> Which thing schal make hem after glade,
> Whan thei ben worthi knihtes made.
> (IV, 1805)

The discussion of chivalry in the Mirour is conducted in approximately 600 lines embedded in similar material. (There are, of course, frequent references throughout the book.) The exchange between Amans and Genius we have been discussing is conducted in a 200-line section framed by two tales. This section contains at least four ideas treated throughout the Mirour and Vox in purely moralistic terms: love as an incitement to arms, love as a threat to knightly prowess, the crusades, and a criticism of the clergy. These four issues are divided impartially between Genius and Amans in such a

way that it is impossible to say that either is a mouthpiece for Gower the moralist. The notion that a knight should be motivated by the desire to impress his lady was rejected in the Mirour (23902). Genius proposes it as an ideal. Amans objects on practical, not moral, grounds. Genius' warning against the dangers of sensual temptation is consistent with similar warnings in the earlier works. In the Vox Gower approves of the crusades. Amans rejects them as un-Christian and couples his criticism with an attack on the clergy which is a recurrent theme in the Mirour and Vox. This attack is bitter and forceful.

> Bot passe thei the salt fom,
> To whom Crist bad thei scholden preche
> To al the world and his feith teche:
> Bot now thei rucken in here nest
> And resten as hem liketh best
> In all the swetnesse of delices.
> Thus thei defenden ous the vices,
> And sitte hemselven al amidde;
> To slen and feihten thei ous bidde
> Hem whom thei scholde, as the bok seith,
> Converten unto Cristes feith.
> Bot hierof have I gret mervaile,
> Hou thei wol bidde me travaile:
> A Sarazin if I sle schal,
> I sle the Soule forth withal,
> And that was nevere Cristes lore.
> Bot nou ho ther, I seie nomore.
> (IV, 1665)

As usual in the Confessio the expression of lore is effective and intrinsically interesting. It should, be obvious, however, that inculcation of doctrine is not the intent of the passage and any attempt to use these

bits of doctrine to prove the continuity of the Confessio with its predecessors must be based on a complete disregard for context. The principle of composition is literary. As in the exchange concerning vainglory, Genius proposes an abstraction to guide Amans' behavior. This statement provokes the lover's reply and provides the material out of which he shapes his self-portrait.

In this case part of the effect comes from the playful handling of the romantic convention that love should inspire a lover to knightly deeds. Chaucer's Troilus, like many romantic heroes before and after, becomes a veritable lion on the battlefield. Amans deliberately and openly distinguishes his behavior from that required by convention. The intent does not seem to be satire. The ideal is not rejected outright. The strategy is that of the basic and familiar literary technique of contrasting the authenticity and spontaneity of the writer's own emotion with conventional literary expressions.[21] To a certain extent this description applies to the critique of the official crusade ethic, although this criticism was common. The integration of this criticism into the lover's reply is superb, giving to it, by the mixture of self-interest and moral principle,

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[21]Cf. Sidney's sonnets i, iii, vi.

the character of an authentic and spontaneous speech of self-justification. Genius' concluding remark on the dangers of love does what every effective transition should do. It looks back, answering Amans' rationalization, and forward, introducing a new tale. The whole exchange is an example of civilized, elegant, urbane writing, perfectly woven for the entertainment of a sophisticated, literate court audience -- and most unsuitable for the pulpit.

The dialogue on chivalry is delicate and charming. It invites us to smile at the lover. But Gower is capable of other moods, darker, more severe, for this love affair is a serious matter. The discussion of Detraction, for example, displays the same skillful weaving of old material into new patterns, only this time almost embarrassing in the frankness of the lover's revelation and painful in the moral rigor of the Confessor's reply.

The points of specific connection with the Mirour are two similes, the "escarbud" (beetle) and the nettle among roses. "Detraction," a species of envy, is compared to the "escarbud."

> La hupe toutdis fait son ny,
> Et l'escarbud converse auci,
> Entour l'ordure et le merdaille;
> Mais de ces champs qui sont flori
> N'ont garde: et par semblance ensi
> Malvoise langue d'enviaille

De l'autri vice et ribaudaille
A ce se tient et se paraille,
Pout detrahir de chacuny;
Mais des vertus dont l'autre vaille,
Pour les oir n'ad point d'oraille,
Ne bouche a parler bien de luy.
(2893)

Elsewhere envy itself is compared to the nettle among roses:

C'est celle urtie mal poignant,
Que d'amertume vait bruillant
La rose qui luy est voisine.
(3721)

Both similes are combined in a single passage in the Confessio in which Genius describes "Detraction" and his agent "Malebouche." As in the Mirror three lines are devoted to the nettle:

For as the Netle which up renneth
The freisshe rede Roses brenneth
And makth him fade and pale of hewe
(II, 401)

In the English passage Gower has increased the force of the comparison by emphasizing the contrast between the healthy and the blighted rose.

The description of the beetle has been expanded from three and a half lines in the Mirour to twelve lines in the Confessio.

Lich to the Scharnebudes kinde,
Of whos nature this I finde,
That in the hoteste of the dai,
Whan comen is the merie Maii,
He sprat his wynge and up he fleth:
And under al aboute he seth
The faire lusti floures springe,
Bot therof hath he no likinge;
Bot where he seth of any beste

> The felthe, ther he makth his feste,
> And therupon he wole alyhte,
> Ther liketh him non other sihte.
> (II, 413)

The discussion as a whole is perfectly consistent with the presentation in the Mirour. There is in this case no disagreement between Genius and "moral" Gower. The differences are stylistic and literary. In the Confessio the figure has been expanded to twelve. The expansion puts the beetle in motion within what, in comparison to the pale background of the Mirour, is a complete landscape. This has been achieved by an amplification of detail and the substitution of a concrete, if conventional, vocabulary for the generalized abstract vocabulary of the French. The 'escarbud' flies at some indefinite time. The 'scharnebude' flies during the hottest part of a May day. The 'escarbud's' motion is limited to two verbs, the generalized "converse" and the negative "n'ont garde". The 'scharnebude', on the other hand, "sprat his wynge and up he fleth". Once Gower has him up in the air he does not forget that from this point of view the fields are "under". When he sights his target he "wole alyhte" and "makth his feste" an activity deducible from but not specified in the French "converse". The general sense of motion is added to by the insistence on the conventional "springing" of the flowers during the "merie" month of May.

While the 'escarbud' flies in "champs qui sont flori" the 'scharnebude' has access to a domain in which "al aboute he seth/The faire lusti flowers springe".

This is not one of Gower's best passages. But it is superior to the French and displays a genuine growth in poetic power.[22] The passage also demonstrates two of Gower's enduring stylistic traits, the effective use of conventional expressions and an emphasis on motion. The "lusti flowers" of "merie Maii", by recalling conventional romantic settings, intensifies the distastefulness of the basic simile. The expression of motion, which is responsible for the passage's vigor, is conveyed not by visual imagery but by the generous use of exactly the right verbs and adverbs. Finally, the passage gains much from condensation and selectivity. In the Mirour, 1400 lines are devoted to the discussion of "Detraccioun." The whole section in the Confessio is allotted approximately 200 lines including the lover's statement. The Mirour contains an indigestible series of similes whose effectiveness is seriously debilitated by the length and diffuseness of the whole passage.

Again Genius' statement is integrally related to the reply of Amans which it provokes. In this instance, there is no tension between the two. Instead we have

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[22]Since there is nothing in the English passage which is beyond the range of Gower's French vocabulary, the difference can be attributed to a growth in poetic power rather than an inadequate command of French.

one of Amans' finest speeches -- unpredictable, spontaneous -- a serious revelation of the pure and the impure in his heart and love. (II, 455, 550). He is not guilty of spreading rumors indiscriminately. He indulges only by speaking privately to his lady. He, of course, does it only to warn her against unscrupulous suitors, even though he knows her character and discretion are sufficient protection. Behind his concern for her is jealousy and fear that another might "fully winne/ Ther as I am yit to beginne." He would go so far as to slander the worthiest rival if he feared his success. The only limit he would observe is set by concern for his lady's good name. "For me were levere lacke breth/ Than speken of hire name amis." In conclusion he can justly claim that he has confessed honestly and is willing to do whatever penance is required.

> For I do make this beheste,
> That I to you have nothing hid,
> But told riht as it is betid.

Genius' reply serves the usual function of introducing the next tale, in this case appropriately enough the tale of Constance. But he first responds in a manner that supports C. S. Lewis' contention that Genius is really the lover's conscience.

> Mi Sone, do nomore so,
> But evere kep thi tunge stille,
> Thou miht the more have of thi wille.
> For as thou saist thiselven here,
> Thi ladi is of such manere,

So wys, so war in alle thinge,
It nedeth of no bakbitinge
That thou thi ladi mis enforme:
For whan sche knoweth al the forme,
How that thiself art envious,
Thou schalt noght be so gracious
As thou peraunter scholdest elles.
Ther wol noman drinke of tho welles
Whiche as he wot is puyson inne,
And ofte swiche as men beginne
Towardes othre, swich thei finde,
That set hem ofte fer behinde,
Whan that thei wene be before.
Mi goode Sone, and thou therfore
Bewar and lef thi wicke speche,
Wherof hath fallen ofte wreche
To many a man befor this time.
For who so wol his handes lime,
Thei mosten be the more unclene;
For many a mote schal be sene
That wolde noght cleve elles there;
And that shold every wys man fere:
For who so wol an other blame,
He secheth ofte his oghne schame,
Which elles myhte be riht stille.
(II, 552)

This is sound doctrine perfectly integrated into the lover's self-revelation. The whole exchange gives the impression of the lover's intense struggle to be better and purer than he is. Doctrine serves not only to provide an occasion for self-revelation but is integrated into the sturggle that is the lover's tale. This is truly mixing "lust and lore".

In general, Genius appears as a rather serious-minded counselor. However, he is not without the ability to smile, and in his re-shaping of "lore" Gower has not exiled humor. A fine example is the description of drunkenness. In the Mirour "Drunkenness" is classed as

the third daughter of "Gluttony" and described in a rather tedious 216 line list of its effects. Book VI of the Confessio is devoted to "Gluttony", but only two branches, "Drunkenness" and "Delicacy", are discussed. After a short general introduction, "Dronkeschipe" itself is described in approximately one quarter the space (60 lines) devoted to it in the Mirour. The virtual catalogue of effects has been reduced to some well-phrased examples.

> There is nothing which he ne can,
> Whil he hath Dronkeschipe on honde,
> He knowth the See, he knowth the stronde,
> He is a noble man of armes,
> And yit no strengthe is in his armes.
> (VI, 26)

Near the end of the passage the whole comes to life in a section for which there is no counterpart in the Mirour:

> That holde I riht a sori feste,
> Whan he that reson understod
> So soudeinliche is woxe wod,
> Or elles lich the dede man,
> Which nouther go ne speke can.
> Thus ofte he is to bedde broght,
> Bot where he lith yit wot he noght,
> Til he arise upon the morwe;
> And thanne he seith, 'O, which a sorwe
> It is a man be drinkeles!'
> So that halfdrunke in such a res
> With dreie mouth he sterte him uppe,
> And seith, 'Nou baillez ça the cuppe.'
> (VI, 48)

While shorter, more effective and brightened by humor, this description is in perfect harmony with the longer analysis in the Mirour. It serves, however, as background

to a description of drunkenness of another species. Love drunkenness is distinguished partly from its grosser analogue by its irresistibility.

> Bot love is of so gret a main,
> That where he takth an herte on honde,
> Ther mai nothing his miht withstonde.
> (VI, 90)

This is one of the recurring motifs of the Confessio. Moreover, it is a vice that has the sympathy of Genius. It is "no schame of such a thew/ A yong man be dronkelew." (VI, 105). This serves as a pretext for Amans to indulge in one of the longest verbalizations of his anguish and joys yet and for Gower to display his rhetorical and idiomatic mastery of the language of love. (VI, 110).

The pattern of Genius' opening statement and Amans' reply, followed by a concluding statement by Genius which serves to introduce a new tale is typical of the Confessio. The sense of naturalness conveyed in this movement is partly due to the fact that Gower has not felt compelled to follow it in a mechanical fashion. For example, the order is varied in the treatment of ingratitude. In the Mirour this vice is classified as the fifth variety of "Covoitise", the first daughter of "Avarice". It is allotted 140 lines. In the Confessio the exposition (V, 4885-4935) is reduced to approximately one third of the original. The unnaturalness, i.e., peculiarity to man, of the vice is stressed.

It is al on to seie unkinde
As thing which don is ayein kinde,
For it with kinde nevere stod
A man to yelden evel for good.
For who that wolde taken hede,
A beste is glad of a good dede,
And loveth thilke creature
After the lawe of his nature
Which doth him ese.
(V, 4923)

Genius' speech is not followed by the lover's reply but serves as an introduction to the tale of Adrian and Bardus. Upon completion of the tale he makes a very specific application of the vice to love, condemning those lovers who, after having achieved their reward, abandon their ladies. Amans replies disapprovingly of this sort of seducer and denies that he would ever act that way. Of course, since he despairs of ever receiving any reward whatsoever, he is unlikely even to have the opportunity to practice the vice. Before moving on to the appropriate tale of "Theseus and Ariadne" Genius warns the lover "Thenk wel, what evere the befalle,/ For noman hath his lustes alle." (V, 5217)

One more example should suffice to confirm the reality of Gower's sense of discrimination in his re-shaping of material in the Confessio. In the Mirour Gower employs the simile of a cat to describe "Peresce".

Peresce ensi comme chat ferine,
Qui volt manger piscon marine,
Mais noun ses pies de la moisture
Voet eneauer deinz la cretine,
Quiert des proufis avoir seisine,
Mais de les charges point ne cure.
(V, 5395)

The Confessio's discussion of "Ydelness" contains what seems to be a direct translation of this simile.

> And as a cat wolde ete fisshes
> Withoute wetinge of his cles,
> So wolde he do, bot natheles
> He faileth ofte of that he wolde.
> (IV, 1108)

The difference in purpose and effectiveness, as usual, is due to the altered context. In the Mirour this simile is only one component of a description amplified for approximately 200 lines. It introduces nothing and serves as the climax to nothing since it is preceded and followed by descriptions of related vices treated in the same homogeneous and amplified manner. In the Confessio the vice receives only 28 lines and does not seem to have greatly interested Gower. Its real function is to serve as an introduction to one of the most effective and exquisite of the lover's self portraits (IV, 1120).[23]

Most but not all of the material classifiable as lore can be accounted for in this way. However, there still remain significant passages that have not been as intensively and consciously shaped and integrated. These include the long statement on history and society in the Prologue, the dissertation on the use of Alchemy in Book IV, the account of the various religions of the world in Book V, and the long digression, embracing the whole field of human knowledge, on the education of a monarch in Book VII.

[23] See below, p. 88.

In the Introduction I called attention to the strength of Gower's taste, reinforced by the taste of his age, for pure didacticism. This taste dominated his career before the beginning of the Confessio and reasserted itself after its completion. To have completely suppressed this tendency in the Confessio would have been a remarkable achievement, especially in view of the fact that such a substantial proportion of its matter consists of reshaped "lore". Unfortunately, for Gower's reputation, this tendency violates modern critical canons. Consequently, the digressions have been widely interpreted by modern readers as serious artistic flaws and impediments to an enjoyment of the poem. However, it is doubtful if Gower's contemporaries would have regarded them as faults in composition. The most popular book of the period, the Romance of the Rose, had sanctioned the practice. Lacking our strong respect for the purity of genres and our belief in the specialized functions of books, it is doubtful that a medieval reader could have regarded the presentation of useful and interesting information as a liability. Moreover, recent studies have begun to make us aware of the relativity of our modern ideal of organic form and its limited applicability to medieval literature.[24] Furthermore, it is possible to account

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[24]Robert M. Jordan, Chaucer and the Shape of Creation (Cambridge, 1967).

for this material on the basis of its thematic relation to the poem as a whole. Professor Peck has argued that these digressions form a sub-plot in which the sickness and healing of England parallels Amans' affair. He even suggests that the increasing length and complexity of the digressions are linked to Amans' growing capacity to absorb experience.[25]

I am personally not entirely convinced that the digressions are successful. Nevertheless, what is surprising is that there are so few and that they take up such a small proportion of the poem. The dissertation on the arts takes up less than one tenth of Book IV (340 lines out of 3710). The discussion of world religions in Book V receives about one sixth of the total number of lines (1230 out of 7840). All of Book VII is devoted to the subject of the education and duties of a king. As such, the whole book is a digression except that it is amply supplied with stories such as the "Rape of Lucrece" which are completely consistent with the Confessio's persistent concern with the disruptive effects of sexual passion. Moreover, Gower is aware that the subject of the king's education is a digression and he is a little uneasy about it. At the end of Book VII Amans asks Genius to return to the main subject.

> Forthi, my goode fader diere,
> Lef al and speke of my matiere
> (VII, 5421)

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[25] R. A. Peck, (ed.), Confessio Amantis (New York, 1968), p. xix.

We could dismiss this as a simple transitional device if the idea had not been mentioned earlier. Amans in his original request for the lesson recognizes that it concerns "thinges strange", i.e., unrelated to love (VI, 2416). Genius, in consenting, twice confesses to his feelings of inadequacy for the task because it is unrelated to his speciality.

> Bot touchende of so hih aprise,
> Which is noght unto Venus knowe,
> I mai it noght miselve knowe,
> Which of hir court am al forthdrawe
> And can nothing bot of hir lawe.
> (VI, 2424)

> I am somdel therof destrauht;
> For it is noght to the matiere
> Of love, why we sitten hiere
> To schryve, so as Venus bad.
> (VII, 6)

In view of the limited extent of the digressions and Gower's almost apologetic recognition of their diversionary character, they surely cannot be taken as clues to his primary purpose. Moreover, as this chapter has tried to demonstrate, they are not typical of Gower's handling of lore in the Confessio.

I have tried to demonstrate that as lore the passages in the Confessio are more effective than their counterparts in the Mirour. Condensation greatly increases the sense of strength and control. Ordinarily, the principal characteristics of the vice as presented in the Mirour are summarized and made more vivid by the

careful selection and expansion of a simile or set of similes or by making more vivid the relevant personification, as in the presentation of drunkenness. Disengaged from the doctrinal matrix of the Mirour, preceded and followed in their new context by contrasting tales and unpredictable responses, the descriptions of the vices can reveal all of their intrinsic force while simultaneously contributing to the establishment of a variety of effects and moods.

That they can do so is due of course to the fact that Gower's primary intent in the Confessio is not instruction. In none of the passages studied does the impulse to teach dominate. In some passages Genius' utterances are in clear contradiction to everything "moral Gower" would have valued most. In others they harmonize. Always doctrine is qualified by the humanity of the lover's response and the convention of the debate form, according to which sides are not taken. Always doctrine is integrated aesthetically into the whole pattern of tale, confession, and lover's portrait.

The intimate relationship of doctrine to the lover's portrait has not been generally recognized. The portrait of the lover is built up in a series of apparently self-sufficient passages. But this self-sufficiency is in fact limited. Genius' speeches always provide the occasion for, and frequently the matter in, the lover's self-revelation.

This is sometimes a formal or technical affair, although not therefore trivial. We recall how much of our sense of Amans' personality is conveyed by his initial responses to Genius' speech. Questioned about rape, Amans replies:

> Certes, fader, no:
> For I mi ladi love so.
> (V, 5532)

It is in these exchanges that the real content of Gower's claim to be writing "somewhat of lust, somewhat of lore" is manifest. He did not mean diversionary material juxtaposed to pure doctrine. He meant lore artistically integrated into a whole whose purpose was not simple indoctrination.

It should now be possible to be a little more precise in defining the sense in which the Mirour served as a source for the Confessio. Those scholars convinced of the homogeneity of Gower's oeuvre would be tempted to see the Mirour and Vox as sources for the Confessio's structure and philosophy. The Confessio is as serious a work as its predecessors. It does share some of their concerns although bringing to them an entirely new perspective. It is, however, possible to account for the vast amount of common material on practical grounds. This explanation will not exhaust the relationship but should help to restore it to truer proportions.

Despite Chaytor's valuable study, we still know too little about the medieval author's habits of

composition, especially his handling of important practical problems such as gathering material.[26] It is evident that the writing of a work the size of the Confessio was a formidable undertaking. Gower, despite his fluency, had large problems in organizing the vast amount of material which he envisaged for the poem. Assembling his material could well have taken energy from the difficult task of shaping it -- and probably would have if he had not already had beside him the vast compendium of the Mirour. This massive work provided him with the equivalent of a modern file cabinet full of relevant material, organized according to the seven deadly sins.

[26] H. J. Chaytor, From Script to Print (Cambridge, 1945).

CHAPTER II

THE TALES

The Confessio has long been admired for the variety of its tales, and Gower's skill as a story teller has been one of the few aspects of his art that has been universally acknowledged. Except for the Canterbury Tales, the variety characteristic of the Confessio's one hundred and fifty tales is probably unequalled. Almost every type of narrative practiced by medieval writers is represented: romance (Tale of Florent); saint's legend (Constantine and Silvester); fabliau (Geta and Amphitrion); classical myth (Acteon); Biblical story (Jephthah's Daughter); historical tale (Mundus and Paulina).

In their presentation even Gower's least enthusiastic readers have been forced to admit his narrative virtues: clarity, economy, speed, and a sense of drama. His clarity has been justly singled out for praise for it is a rarer quality than one would expect in an age addicted to story telling. All of these qualities, however, are matters of technique, and technique can be learned by discipline, instruction, and attention. All of these are admirable in themselves and have been

undervalued by modern critics. However, we are likely to demand more from an author if he is to engage our serious interest. We expect technique to serve the projection of a unique and significant vision. In general, the recognition of the existence of such a vision, much less an attempt to define it, has not been a feature of criticism of the Confessio.[27] Recognition has been hindered by the usual comparisons with Chaucer. Chaucer's tales have a richness and philosophical and artistic fullness that make them inexhaustibly interesting and satisfying. The Confessio is the equal of the Canterbury Tales in variety of stories, but Gower cannot match the range and boldness of linguistic experiment which Chaucer has applied to the treatment of the various genres. It is obvious that none of the tales in the Confessio is capable of supporting or provoking the diversity of interpretation that for better or worse has been the fate of even the least of the Canterbury Tales.

Nevertheless, the simplicity of both language and narrative of Gower's tales is deceptive and certainly does not preclude the projection of an authentic and personal poetic world. In this chapter I attempt to give a definition of some of the more important characteristics of this world. The Confessio contains approximately one hundred fifty tales, almost all of them well

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[27]For exceptions, see Lewis, Pearsall and Wickert.

told even though not all are equally important. The sheer number makes a complete, systematic analysis of all the tales and sources impracticable.[28] Moreover, it is unnecessary for the demonstration of the point of view I hope to establish: that as a story teller Gower is more than a skilled craftsman, that the tales are animated by authentic poetic inspiration, that they express an authentic vision. The center of this vision is a concern with man and nature. Nature is complex, essentially benign and life-nourishing, yet poses painful dilemmas for man. Man is viewed as having his primary locus at a point of tension between the natural and moral orders. In his presentation of the interplay of man and nature, the presence of "moral Gower" is always manifest, not, however, in the form of a doctrinaire and oppressive didacticism but as a deep, pervasive concern with the moral commitments of his characters and the context and implications of their actions.

Gower shared with his contemporaries a taste for classic fable, especially the familiar tales of Ovid. While he drew upon almost every available source for narrative material it was Ovid upon whom he relied most heavily and an examination of his handling of this material, especially the tales from the Metamorphoses, provides

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[28]See Appendix, p. 207.

the most accessible and illuminating entrance into the world of the Confessio.[29]

Love's Metamorphoses

Professor Bennett has suggested that Gower's attitude toward classical mythology was more akin to that of the Renaissance humanists than to his medieval contemporaries.[30] If the elaborate allegorical embroideries of the Ovide Moralisé are representative of the fourteenth century, then Gower is atypical. Gower shapes the stories to serve as exempla. Shaping includes adding and subtracting details as well as rearranging. But for Gower the key word is "story". He has confidence in the

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[29]For a general view of Ovid in the Middle Ages, see E. K. Rand, Ovid and His Influence (Boston, 1925). John J. McNally in an unpublished doctoral dissertation, Gower, Ovid and the Religion of Courtly Love, the Shaping of the Confessio Amantis (Chicago, 1961), surveys the scholarship with special reference to Ovid's significance for the Confessio. He also provides detailed comparisons of a number of the forty-some tales in the Confessio traceable to Ovid with their originals. Herbert Davison's unpublished master's thesis, "John Gower's Use in the Confessio Amantis of the Narrative Material of Ovid" (Cincinnati, 1940), contains similar material. Both authors establish Gower's independence in handling his sources and the uniqueness of his attitude towards Ovid. Neither draws very significant conclusions concerning Gower's ultimate purposes. In this respect, the comparisons in Pearsall's article are more helpful.

[30]Selections from John Gower, p. xi.

tale's ability to carry its own weight. A well told tale will make its "sentence" felt without overanxious explication by the teller. Gower's attitude toward his sources, secular and sacred, was one of respectful sovereignty. He remakes a Biblical story as freely as an Ovidian tale. There is, however, a consistent pattern to his handling of Ovid's material. He condenses, cutting out the bathos, sensuality, sensationalism, rhetorical exuberance, sophisticated wit, and urbane cynicism, while highlighting the moral issues.

In short, Gower rejects what are usually taken to be the quintessential Ovidian qualities. Since Gower rejected what his contemporaries found most appealing we might be tempted to conclude that Ovid was simply another room in the vast storehouse of antiquity that formed the normal resources of the medieval story teller. This is partly true. But there is evidence that Gower found something in Ovid that was not available in equal abundance elsewhere. Professor Bennett has noted the basic structural analogies between the Metamorphoses and the Confessio.[31] Both are collections of tales whose common theme of the disruptive effects of passion is set in a universal, cosmological and political frame work.

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[31] Ibid., p. xii.

Bennett also pointed out that what interested Gower in Ovid were the transformations. This is not true of all of Gower's versions of Ovidian material. A tale such as "Theseus and Ariadne" is as well told as any in the Confessio, yet the transformation is not extraordinarily interesting, and does not call forth any far-reaching reverberations. Yet Professor Bennett's suggestion is shrewd. It can take us close to the heart of Gower's concerns and bring into relief the peculiar qualities of his vision.

We might ask why Gower found the transformations so fascinating. The obvious answer is a natural interest in the strange and miraculous. But Gower's suspicion of "veine science" was deep. It is doubtful that Gower pored over Ovid out of idle curiosity. A clue to the nature of Gower's interest is provided by Professor Fox:

> Gower ascribes his conception of man the microcosm to Gregory the Great...
>
> It is obvious that Gower's conception of man the microcosm is more comprehensive than Gregory's, for Gower assumes not only that man contains in himself the characteristics of all created things, but that for that reason his actions affect the rest of nature.[32]

The conclusion of Fox's study is that

> Gower's knowledge of science was neither profound nor vital...

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[32]George C. Fox, The Medieval Sciences in the Works of Gower (Princeton, 1931), p. 20.

> It is clear that Chaucer had studied the sciences until he had become at home with them, and was capable of thinking in terms of them. In Chaucer the stuff of science is woven into the fabric of his stories. In Gower, the science is always superficial, unassimilated.[33]

As proof, Fox had earlier pointed out the conventionality of Gower's list of the ways in which man affects nature (C.A. Prol. 910-970). Perhaps Gower's assimilation of the vocabularies of the natural sciences was not as thorough as Chaucer's, although as usual the comparison between Chaucer and Gower is apt to be misleading. What is important is that Gower's expansion of Gregory is placed in the Prologue to the Confessio. We should remember not only the correspondence to the prologue of the Metamorphoses but that it occurs within the context of the statement of Gower's basic theme, the division in nature caused by the Fall. Gower is making explicit his previous and basic concerns and, as always, he does it in competent verse.

> Thus of his propre qualite
> The man, as telleth the clergie,
> Is as a world in his partie,
> And whan this litel world mistorneth,
> The grete world al overtorneth.
> The Lond, the See, the firmament,
> Thei axen alle jugement
> Ayein the man and make him werre:
> Therwile himself stant out of herre,
> The remenant wol noght acorde:
> And in this wise, as I recorde,
> The man is cause of alle wo,
> Why this world is divided so.
> (Prologue, 954)

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[33] Ibid., p. 156.

In the doctrine of the microcosm Gower found confirmation for his belief in the interpenetrability of morality and nature. In the Prologue it is made explicit in the rational terms of science. But Gower's belief is not the product of rational examination. It is part of his deepest personal intuitions. Science only confirmed what his moral and poetic sense already knew. It is possible to read the Confessio as a study of the interplay of nature and the whole complex superstructure derived from the fact of man's transcendence. Most of his stories, all of the best, focus on the point of tension between nature or eros, and some aspect of lex positiva as it exerts its moral imperative on a human individual. The doctrine of the microcosmos is the appropriate statement in abstract terms of this intuition. However, measured by the complexity and subtlety of the poetic expression in the best of the Ovidian stories, it is inadequate. Beneath the Ovidian filigree Gower saw a view of human nature as the nexus of the natural and moral orders. At times the pressure is so great that something must break and we witness one of those transformations that we class as miracles but to Gower were a rational, explicable phenomenon within the structure of reality as he understood it.

Gower's delicate and sensitive artistry in combination with his fine moral discrimination is probably

nowhere more evident than in his version of the tale of Philomena (V, 5550), a story that provoked only a perfunctory performance and confession of lack of interest from Chaucer. Chaucer's lack of interest is, of course, understandable. Stripped of Ovid's verbal filigree the plot offers more potential for a tabloid shocker than for the deceptively sophisticated, civilized, delicate artifact into which Gower has transformed it. As usual, Gower's recreation involves a stripping of the essential Ovidian elements both with respect to content and rhetorical effect. Physical horrors are muted or omitted. The emphasis is placed on psychological, moral and mental reality. As soon as we overhear the gentle speech of Progne to her lord we realize we are far from the pagan world of Ovid and in a realm where the level of civilization holds the actual physical horror at a distance only so that the moral significance can be more accurately gauged.

> "I wole" he seide, "for thi sake
> The weie after thi Soster take
> Miself, and bringe hire, if I may."
> And sche with that, there as he lay,
> Began him in hire armes clippe,
> And kist him with her softe lippe,
> And seide, "Sire, grant mercy."
> And he sone after was redy,
> And tok his leve forto go.
> (V, 5587)

Gower does more than establish a new moral context. He establishes the personality of Progne as warm, impulsive, tender and loving. This does more to emphasize the

significance of her later deeds than any amount of dwelling on the actual horrors.

The personality of the characters does more than establish a tone. Gower is probably not interested in, or committed to, the exploration of individual psychology in any modern sense. Indeed, the story's success is in its registration of forces that transcend the individual. However, he has, in this tale, taken more care to maintain psychological consistency than a medieval author ordinarily felt obligated to observe. This consistency is essential to the center of Gower's interest in the story, the transformations. Ovid uses them as an effective means of ending the story. In themselves, they seem to interest him little. Nor did they seem to interest Gower's contemporaries. As Gower handles the transformations the individual's form is changed but his identity is preserved and forever crystallized in the new guise.

> Diverseliche, as men mai finde,
> After thastat that thei were inne.
> (V, 5940)

Philomena is a relatively passive creature, given no voice in the decisions that precipitated the action, and her weakness and need for protection are dramatized in the rape scene.

And in a rage on hire he ran,
Riht as a wolf which takth his preie.
And sche began to crie and preie,
"O fader, o mi moder diere,
Nou help!" Bot thei ne mihte it hiere,
And sche was of to litel myht
Defense ayein so ruide a knyht
To make, whanne he was so wod
That he no reson understod,
Bot hield hire under in such wise,
That sche ne myht noght arise,
Bot lay oppressed and desesed,
As if a goshauk hadde sesed
A brid, which dorste noght for fere
Remue:
(V, 5635)

She is physically weak but capable of passion, moral strength, and determination, and it is with passion that she utters the only threat she knows she is capable of executing -- calling on others for vengeance.

That I schall telle out al mi fille,
And with mi speche I schal fulfille
The wyde world in brede and lengthe.
....
For I so loude it schall reherce,
That my vois schal the hevene perce,
That it schal soune in goddes Ere.
(V, 5659)

Her threat gives motivation to Tereus' mad mutilation. Gower does not shrink from an almost obligatory acknowledgement of the physical horror but he manages to color it by a note of tenderness.

Bot yit whan he hire tunge refte,
A litel part therof belefte,
Bot sche with al no word mai soune,
Bot chitre and as a brid jargoune.
(V, 5697)

Throughout the final revenge for which she is the cause, she is a relatively passive bystander. The

nightingale "Which in the wynter is noght sene" is the apt form for her transformed self. The stress is upon the strength of her shame and her determination never to be seen.

> Hir will was evere to ben hid
> And forto duelle in prive place,
> That noman scholde sen hir face
> For schame, which mai noght be lassed,
> Of thing that was tofore passed,
> Whan that sche loste hir maidenhiede:
> For evere upon hir wommanhiede,
> Though that the goddes wolde hire change,
> Sche thenkth, and is the more strange,
> And halt hir clos the wyntres day.
> (V, 5950)

Nature cannot erase her shame or defeat her determination but nevertheless does provide mitigating grace.

> Bot whan the wynter goth away,
> And that Nature the goddesse
> Wole of hir oughne fre largesse
> With herbes and with floures both
> The feldes and medwes clothe,
> And ek the wodes and the greves
> Ben heled al with grene leves,
> So that a brid hire hyde mai,
> Between Averil and March and Maii
> ....
> Sche makth hir pleignte and seith, "O why,
> O why ne were I yit a maide?"
> ....
> And ek thei seide hou in hir song
> Sche makth gret joie and merthe among,
> And seith, "Ha, nou I am a brid,
> Ha, nou mi face ben hid:
> Thogh I have lost mi Maidenhede,
> Schal noman se my chekes rede."
> Thus medleth sche with joie wo
> And with hir sorwe merthe also.
> (V, 5960)

Progne's portrayal contrasts sharply with her sister's. Direct and forceful as well as restrained, she shares her

sister's determination combined with a much greater ability to act in the world. As soon as Tereus returns

> Sche began to axe him streite,
> "Wher is mi Soster?"
> (V, 5715)

She grieves and provides a rich burial

> For sche fond non amendement
> To syghen or to sobbe more:
> (V, 5728)

Her recovery from the initial shock of the news of what really happened to her sister is equally rapid and decisive.

> Bot ate laste, "Of such outrages,"
> Sche seith, "wepinge is noght the bote:"
> And swerth, if that sche live mote,
> It schal be venged otherwise.
> And with that sche gan hire avise
> Hou ferst sche miht unto hire winne
> Hir Soster,
> (V, 5792)

Everything about her is consistent with her transformation into the swallow where she is forever confined to the frantic gestures of wrath and despair.

> Then fleth sche forth and givth to chide,
> And chitreth out in hir langage
> What falshod is in marriage,
> And telleth in a maner speche
> Of Tereus the Spousebreche.
> Sche wol noght in the wodes duelle,
> For sche wolde openliche telle;
> Thus ben the Sostres briddes bothe,
> And ben toward the men so lothe,
> That thei ne wole of pure schame
> Unto no mannes hand tame.
> (V, 6010)

Tereus is treated more cursorily, yet consistently with the impulsive, violent, yet still "A worthi king of

hih lignage" that has characterized him throughout the story.

> For anon after he was changed
> And from his oghne kinde stranged,
> A lappewincke mad he was,
> And thus he hoppeth on the gras,
> And on his hed ther stant upriht
> A creste in tokne he was a kniht;
> And yet unto this dai men seith,
> A lappewincke hath lore his feith
> And is the brid falseste of alle.
> (V, 6038)

This tale combines the two primary aspects of Gower's concerns: the moral order and its relationship to nature. He has carefully disentangled the tale from its Ovidian, pagan framework and embedded it in a highly structured moral universe the key term of which is "trouthe". Again and again throughout the tale Tereus' violation of his marriage vows is stressed. This is not due to indifference to the violence that fills the story and in most versions is the focus of attention. But in Gower's moral system the breaking of "trouthe" is the greatest sin because it opens the floodgates to every sort of crime. Tereus breaks the moral law under the promptings of sexual desire and in so doing disrupts both natural and moral communities. He breaks the natural bond between father and daughter. The chain of events he sets in motion results in a moral transformation more repugnant than any of the physical horrors - that of Progne into a maddened beast capable of killing her own son. The breaking of the moral law

leads to the breaking of the natural law, something only a creature bound by moral law could do.

The crystallization of a cluster of traits or attitudes that characterized the individual in his first incarnation is the distinguishing trait of Gower's handling of the transformations. These transformations remind us, if only faintly, of Dante. The comparison is relevant from another point of view. Were Gower imaginatively the typical medieval man his doctrine implies, the world of the transformed souls might have been a hell, but it is not. Surely these sinners are as deserving of hell as any in the Divine Comedy. Yet Pearsall describes the transformations as "developed by Gower with great charm and tenderness, as if to mitigate the horror of the story he has just been telling by re-enacting it in a 'distanced' world where human emotions and values are poeticized."[34]

As I have shown, Gower's strong ethical sense and awareness of moral causality are present throughout the poem. The tale is embedded in a moral order. Yet the vision is not of a relentless, pitiless mechanism of retributive justice presided over by a stern Old Testament God. On the contrary, what is asserted is the healing, reconciling power of nature. In this there is logic. Tereus is provoked into breaking "trouthe" by a force

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[34]Pearsall, p. 479.

which in essence is good. If nature disrupts, it also heals. The transformations themselves are healing. The theme is hauntingly expressed in the long description of Philomena as a nightingale.

> Bot whan the wynter goth away,
> And that Nature the goddesse
> Wole of hir oughne fre largesse
> With herbes and with floures both
> The felds and the medwes clothe,
> And ek the wodes and the greves
> Ben heled al with grene leves,
> So that a brid hire hyde m ai,
> Betwen Averil and March and Maii,
> Sche that the wynter hield hir clos,
> For pure schame and noght aros,
> Whan that sche seth the bowes thikke,
> And that ther is no bare sticke,
> Bot al is hid with leves grene,
> To wode comth this Philomene
> And makth hir ferste yeres flyht;
> (V, 5960)

Gower makes sparing use, in the Confessio at least, of the resources of medieval rhetoric. But in the description of what Philomena, and thus both Amans and the reader, has learned, he shows how effective they can be poetically.

> Thus medleth sche with joie wo
> And with hir sorwe merthe also,
> So that of loves maladie
> Sche makth diverse melodie,
> And seith love is a woful blisse,
> A wisdom which can noman wisse,
> A lusti fievere, a wounde softe:
> This note sche reherceth ofte
> To hem whiche understonde hir tale.
> (V, 5989)

What we are to understand is that within the context of this story the ultimate reality is nature in her

creative, life-giving and -preserving aspects. In the transformations we have a deeply felt poetic expression of the sense of nature as mother. In the perspective of this reality the turbulent story of Progne is a minor storm, a slight disturbance on the surface of an infinitely vaster reality whose workings, while involved in chains of causality that sometimes result in human misery, are not ultimately malignant. Gower's version of the tale is as much an assertion of the goodness of the world as it is a study of human passion unrestrained by reason. It is no little evidence of the integrity of his vision that he sees the two as intimately bound.

Gower's version of the Philomena tale combines perhaps more of his themes than any other single story from Ovid. But Ovid inspired other tales equal in concentration if less inclusive. These tales explored aspects of the territory defined in "Philomena". Sexual violation, both physical and moral, is one of the prominent themes of the Ovidian material. In these stories Gower, while faithful to individual psychology, seems less concerned with it than with the probing of certain psychic forces and their relationship to the larger forces of which they are the manifestation. They all have certain traits in common. In all, the violated or pursued maid appeals to those divine powers who seem to have a special interest in her purity and yet paradoxically

enough are also related to the very drive which in its perverted form is functioning as a threat. Occasionally, as in the tale of Neptune and Cornix (V, 6145), the divinity steps in and rescues the threatened maid (by a timely transformation into a crow). In others, reminiscent of Philomena, the gods cannot prevent the violation nor does it seem to be in their power to wipe out the consequent shame, partly because the gods themselves seem divided.

Calistona has sworn herself to that stern goddess Diana, but does not succeed in eluding the resourceful Jupiter. Gower refers to Jupiter's successful strategem only as "his queintise". While Ovid dwells on the rape/seduction, Gower focuses on the result.

> That sodeinliche forth withal
> Hire wombe aros and sche toswal,
> So that it mihte noght ben hidd.
> (V, 6251)

Gower in his choice of verbs almost manages to suggest that her womb, in an assertion of independence, had joined those forces that for their own disparate reasons, had conspired to torment her. Diana is, of course, unappeasable and expresses nothing but scorn.

> Awey, thou foule beste,
> Sche seide, for thin astat is noght honeste
> This chaste water forto touche
> For thou hast take such a touche
> Which nevere mai ben hol ayein.
> (V, 6275)

Angry Juno joins the outcast's persecutors and turns her into a bear who eventually encounters her own son, now a formidable hunter. He is about to slay her but she recognizes him

> For thogh sche hadde hir forme lore
> The love was noght lost therfore
> Which kinde hath set under his lawe.
> (V, 6321)

In response Jupiter saves both by transforming his son into a bear also.

A similar pattern is evident in the tale of Leuchotoe.

> A clene Maide and a Virgine,
> Upon the whos nativite
> Of comelihiede and of beaute
> Nature hath set al that sche may,
> That lich unto the fresshe Maii,
> Which othre monthes of the year
> Surmonteth...
> (V, 6732)

Phebus cannot resist the temptation and ravishes her. Strangely enough it is Venus who turns out to be "enemie/ Of thilke loves micherie," and who provokes the wrath of Leuchotoe's father. He "wol no pite have" and buries her alive. But Phebus repents and arranges for her transformation.

> That sche sprong up out of the molde
> Into a flour was named golde,
> Which stant governed of the Sonne.
> (V, 6779)

Gower's version of Acteon (I, 336) is so short and concise that at first glance it has almost the appearance of a plot summary rather than a fully developed tale.

Gower's omissions are extensive and significant. As Peck points out, Gower eliminates Acteon's companions, the description of Diana's disrobing, the attempts of her attendants to shield her from Acteon's view, the throwing of the water, the list of hounds, Acteon's efforts to explain, and the gods' debate on the justice of the punishment; he adds the detail of Acteon's pride and implies that Acteon could have turned his eye away, whereas Ovid blames Fortune.[35]

Gower has treated his source in his usual manner. He has toned down all the sensational elements and ignored the ample opportunities for titillation intrinsic to the story. Pride is more than an added detail. It becomes a positive force, a veritable protagonist of the drama. Acteon's pride is asserted in the verse, especially the crucial point at which he does not turn his eyes away.

> Bot he his yhe awey ne swerveth
> Fro hire, which was naked al.
> (I, 366)

His unabashed boldness is reflected in the gallop of this series of naked vowels, in a line containing an extra syllable, which breaks into the traditional rendering of the forest paradise.

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[35] Confessio Amantis, p. 501.

... the grene gras
The faire freisshe floures springe.
(I, 352)

His charge is answered by the implacable wrath of Diana, a response emphasized by alliteration.

And sche was wonder wroth withal,
(I, 368)

The absence on Acteon's part of any impulse to curb his boldness is matched by Diana's unhesitating reaction. Without a pause even to consider pity

... the liknesse
Sche made him taken of an Hert.
(I, 370)

Gower achieves an intensity in this little piece that surpasses almost any other version, including those of Ovid and Spenser. He suggests the clash of wills between two related but opposed forces. His interpretation of chastity as a fierce, assertive force shows a sure grasp of the psychic reality behind the pagan goddess.

The above group of tales focused on love's disruptive but ultimately healing force. Love also works in more directly positive ways. In his telling of the Ceix and Alceone story Gower again distinguishes himself from other narrators, including Chaucer, by his interest in the transformations which in the words of one critic, "provide the opportunity for an affirmation of the pathetic endurance of wifely fidelity."[36]

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[36]Pearsall, p. 483.

Sche fondeth in hire briddes forme,
If that sche mihte hirself conforme
To do the pleasance of a wife,
As sche did in that other lif:
For thogh sche hadde hir pouer lore,
Hir will stod as it was tofore,
And serveth him so as sche mai.
(IV, 3109)

It is possible to say more. In the story of Philomena breaking of "trouthe" disrupted, a disruption ratified as well as mitigated by nature. In Ceix and Alceone the keeping of "trouthe" mitigates the inevitable disruptions of nature. It seems to affirm the power of love over the accidents of nature and the responsiveness of the gods to the power of moral affirmation combined with eros.

This infortune of double harm
The goddes fro the hevene above
Behielde, and for the trowthe of love,
Which in this worthi ladi stod...
(IV, 3087)

In other tales the transforming responsiveness of the gods of love to intensity of desire is asserted in a less moralistic context. "Pygmalion" is perhaps the most intense and successful. Its force comes from the skill with which Gower expressed the restless urgency of the courtly lover.

And after, whan the nyht was come,
He leide hire in his bed al nakid.
He was forwept, he was forwakid,
He keste hire colde lippes ofte,
And wissheth that thei weren softe,
And ofte he rouneth in hire Ere,
And ofte his arm now hier now there

He leide, as he hir wolde embrace,
And evere among he axeth grace,
As thogh sche wiste what he mente;
And thus himself he gan tormente
With such desese of loves peine,
That noman nihte him more peine.
(IV, 402)

Gower has tapped the original sources of the myth's power: the combination of lover's delirium, intoxication, and its roots in both eros and the creative imagination, and the power of this combination to create life.

In the tales discussed above, the distinguishing characteristic is an awareness of the working of nature and the permutations of the psychic forces activated by her. The concern with these forces is not restricted to tales from the Metamorphoses. An awareness of the power of desire permeates the Confessio. The energizing agent of nature in some form animates every tale. The sanctity and irresistibility of her workings are a basic theme which repeatedly finds explicit and implicit development. The tale of "Canace and Machaire" (III, 150), for example, is built upon the assertion of love's power and the need for human recognition of this power in the judgment of sins committed under its influence. Canace and Machaire, children of Eolus, are together from birth.

Til thei be growen up alofte
Into the youthe of lusti age,
Whan kinde assaileth the corage
With love and doth him forto bowe,
That he no reson can allowe,
Bot halt the lawes of nature:
For whom that love hath under cure,

> As he is blind himself, riht so
> He makth his client blind also.
> ....
> And so it fell hem ate laste
> That this Machaire with Canace
> Whan thei were in a prive place,
> Cupide bad hem ferst to kesse,
> And after sche which is Maistresse
> In kinde and techeth every lif
> Without lawe positif,
> Of which sche takth nomanner charge,
> Bot kepth hire lawes al at large,
> Nature tok him into lore
> And tawht him so, that overmore
> Sche hath him in such wise daunted,
> That thei were, as who seith, enchaunted.
> (III, 152)

Canace becomes pregnant. Machaire flees, leaving her to face the wrath of her father, the king, who has made an absolute of "lawe positif," unqualified by an awareness of love's power. Consequently,

> Anon into Malencolie,
> As thogh it were a frenesie,
> He fell, as he which nothing cowthe
> How maistreful love is in yowthe:
> And for he was to love strange,
> He wolde noght his herte change
> To be benigne and favorable
> To love, bot unmerciable
> Betwen the wawe of wod and wroth
> ....
> Bot his horrible crualte
> Ther mihte attempre no pite.
> (III, 209)

Eolus orders her execution, and in an effort to move the reader to pity for her sake, Gower comes closer to bathos than in any other tale. Canace writes a farewell letter to her "dedly frend" in which occurs a scene more melodramatic than Gower's usual manner.

> In my riht hand my Penne I holde,
> And in my left the swerd I kepe,
> And in my barm ther lith to wepe
> Thi child and myn, which sobbeth faste.
> (III, 300)

She falls upon the sword and her son swims in the warm blood until wrathful Eolus orders him cast into the wilderness. In the closing lines the ignorance behind the violence is again emphasized.

> Ha, who herde evere singe or rede
> Of such a thing as that was do?
> Bot he which ladde his wrathe so
> Hath knowe of love bot a lite.
> (III, 330)

The tales of Narcissus and Rosiphelee emphasize both the danger and sin involved in a rejection of love. The tale of Narcissus emphasizes the hero's pride but does not fail to assert the healing power of the forces which have destroyed him. The nymphs care for his body out of "pure pite that thei have" (I, 2347). The tale of Rosiphelee concerns a maid whose rejection of love is so complete that she:

> Desireth nother Mariage
> Ne yit the love of paramours,
> Which evere hath be the comun cours
> Amonges hem that lusti were.
> (IV, 1267)

"Rosiphelee" is followed by the tale of "Jephthah's Daughter." She is not guilty of sloth but is the tragic victim of her father's unfortunate oath. Gower has expanded the story (from Judges xi) in order to focus upon the waste of her unfulfilled maidenhood.

Complementing these tales, whose primary interest is with the realm of impulse in itself, are others whose concern is with the working of desire as it complicates the lives of individuals, their personal relations, and society as a whole. Marriage is involved in all. "Ulysses and Penelope" (IV, 145) is hardly a tale, but Penelope's letter is a perfect expression of Gower's ideal of matrimonial affection enriched by courteous love. However, most tales are more concerned with a disruption of equilibrium. "Deianira and Nessus" and "Albinus and Rosemund" are both studies of the internal collapse of a relationship.

Professor Pearsall, normally sympathetic to Gower's adaptations of Ovid, has no patience with his version of "Deianira and Nessus."

> Gower's attempt to explain Hercules' death as the punishment for "love untrewe" (II, 2261) and, it seems, for transvestitism (II, 2268-74) is merely trivial. Myth, like tragedy, was not tractable to Gower's method and he can make nothing of the grandeur and fury of Hercules' dying agonies.[37]

But my preceding discussion has established the depth of Gower's response to myth. Even if this tale shows little response to myth or tragedy, a comparison with its source shows that Gower is not attempting to duplicate Ovid's effects. Surely it is impossible to argue that he had an obligation to his source. In this case Gower is

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[37] Ibid., p. 480.

using Ovid as raw material. The most obvious alterations are the usual ones. Gower shortens, trimming all of the sensational elements, including the long description of Hercules' suffering. But there is in Gower a fundamental shift in intent. Ovid is dealing with gods or at least semi-divine creatures. His theme is heroic suffering and heroic bravery. Gower is concerned with real people in a real relationship in which the crucial causes are not arbitrary whims of the gods but a humanly intelligent and relevant scheme of morality.

Gower's most important alteration is to change the rumor of Hercules' infidelity to a fact, the assertion of which is the moral and formal pivot of the story. The statement is put within the context of the passage of time. Ovid perfunctorily informs us that "time passed." Time is not a reality in his mythological world. Gower's verse on the other hand, conveys the slow, inexorable movement that makes both time and the transience of human affections seem intimately connected.

> The daies gon, the yeres passe,
> The hertes waxen lasse and lasse
> Of hem that been to love untrewe:
> This Hercules with herte newe
> His love hath set on Eolen.
> (II, 2258)

Gower has condensed the Nessus episode and more effectively integrated it into his total story by emphasizing the most important element, the shirt. Ovid in describing

Nessus' presentation of the shirt gives only the necessary information. Gower takes the opportunity to express Deianira's internal state.

> Who was tho glad bot Deianyre?
> Hire thoghte hire herte was afyre
> Til it was in hire cofre loke
> So that no word therof was spoke.
> (II, 2255)

Ovid's Deianira is fierce:

> What if O Meleager, remembering that I am your sister, I make bold to plan some dreadful deed, and by killing my rival prove how much a woman's outraged feelings and grief can do.[38]

Gower's Deianira is markedly milder and concerned more with the loss of her man than the damage to her pride. Her concern is not revenge but getting him back. She is pathetic and ladylike.

> Whan Deianyre hath herd this speche,
> Ther was no sorwe forto seche:
> Of other helpe wot sche non,
> Bot goth unto hire cofre anon;
> With wepende yhe and woful herte
> Sche tok out thilke unhappi scherte,
> As sche that wende wel to do.
> (II, 2775)

Her intentions are good, but

> That whan sche wende best have wonne,
> Sche lost al that sche hath begonne.
> (II, 2289)

Ovid ends his tale with a vivid description of Hercules' sufferings and an assertion of his divinity.

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[38]Citations to Ovid are to the editions of the Loeb Classical Library.

> quid si me, Meleagre, tuam memor esse sororem
> forte paro facinus, quontumque iniuria possit
> femineusque dolor, iugulata paelice testor?
> (Metem. IX, 149)

Gower describes the effects of the shirt with restraint and dissolves the mythological context. He ends by focusing not on the physical pains of Hercules but the suffering and remorse of Deianira and the mutuality of the tragedy.

> Which thing cam al thrugh Falssemblant,
> That false Nessus the Geant
> Made unto him and to his wif.
> (II, 2303)

Ovid has written heroic tragedy. Gower has written a domestic tragedy which reflects the break-up of a marriage, and the desperate, disastrous effort to hold it together by sheer force of will.

In "Albinus and Rosemund" Gower attempts to deal with the same theme, the precariousness of real human relations, the way in which they are subject to ambushes of treacherous impulses, the meeting of opportunity with rash decision to create a turning point in a relationship, the way in which people destroy their love and each other. In this case, Gower's raw material was less tractable than usual and betrays his awkwardness with a longer tale. But his purpose is evident in his alterations which, as Macaulay points out, have been conducted so as to focus on Albinus' punishment for boasting and not on Rosemund's eventual fate.[39]

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[39] Works, I, p. 477.

Rosemund has accepted the slaying of her father by Albinus and her new position without protest.

> And after that long time in reste
> With hire he duelte, and to the beste
> Thei love ech other wonder wel
> (I, 2488)

Albinus' love is sincere. Paradoxically it is at his most passionate ("In al the hoteste of here love") that the flaw appears. His love is also a love of power and display. His manliness is confirmed by the total possession and submission of Rosemund. At a feast before all his lords he forces her to drink from her father's skull.

> Tho was ther mochel Pride alofte,
> Thei speken alle, and sche was softe,
> Thenkende on thilke unkynde Pride,
> Of that hire lord so nyh hire side
> Avanteth him that he hath slain
> And picked out hire fader brain,
> And of the Skulle had mad a Cuppe.
> Sche soffreth al til thei were uppe,
> (I, 2563)

In this version of an old and popular story, Gower has managed to convey a sense of the actual dynamics of a real relationship. Since the climax is a reversal in love "sche which kepth the blinde whel/ Venus" is blamed. But the turn in the wheel of fortune is identical with the sudden decision that changed the course of the relationship.

Other tales are wider in scope, studying the interaction of sexual passion, the individual, and society.

Since they necessarily have implications for the process of governing, many, but not all, are placed in Book VII. The "Rape of Lucrece" and the "Tale of Virginia" are particularly fine versions of familiar tales. The "Rape of Lucrece" is especially successful in its delineation of motivation and slow buildup of suspense. Arrons stealthily approaches Lucrece's room where:

> Al sodeinliche and in he crepte,
> And hire in bothe his Armes tok.
> With that this worthi wif awok,
> Which thurgh tendresce of wommanhiede
> Hire vois hath lost for pure drede,
> That o word speke sche ne dar:
> (VII, 4972)

Both the "Rape of Lucrece" and the "Tale of Virginia" express Gower's concern with the common good and a society's efforts to purge itself of the effects of a ruler's lust-motivated misgovernment. The tale of Lucrece closes with the assertion of a communal consensus on the restoration of moral order.

> So that the comun clamour tolde
> The newe schame of Sennes olde.
> And al the toun began to crie,
> "Awey, awey the tirannie
> Of lecherie and covoitise!"
> (VII, 5115)

In the "Tale of Virginia" it is common fear that motivates common action.

> And that broghte in the comun feere,
> That every man the peril dradde
> Of him that so hem overladde.
> Forthi, er that it worse falle,
> Thurgh comun conseil of hem alle
> Thei have here wrongfull king deposed.
> (VII, 5290)

The tale of "Mundus and Paulina" (I, 760) is concerned with moral motivation and the exact distribution of justice. Gower is not interested in psychology per se, but rather in his characters' moral commitments. Paulina is described in generalized terms that would fit any heroine of romance.

> Of al the Cite the faireste,
> And as men seiden, ek the beste.
> (I, 767)

Under pressure her moral integrity becomes apparent and individualizes her. The Duke, after successfully seducing her in the guise of the god Anubus, cannot refrain from revealing his deception to her. His explanation is cynical and suave (VII, 940). Paulina's reaction is typical of Gower's heroines.

> Sche herde his tale and bar it stille,
> And hom sche wente, as it befell,
> (I, 952)

Instead of berating the Gods for her deception, she thanks them for at least not allowing her to persist in her illusion.

The denouement is both exemplary and moving. Paulina's husband is worthy of her. To himself he vows vengeance. But his first concern is his wife's welfare. Above all he is concerned to assure her "that he with hire is nothing wroth." (I, 986). They take counsel with their friends, and, after spending time in reflection, decide to appeal to the emperor rather than to seek private

vengeance. The emperor distributes justice in accordance with Gower's precise scale. The priests, for whom no excuse can be found, are executed. The Duke is only exiled,

> For he with love was bestad,
> His dom was noght so harde lad;
> For Love put reson aweie
> And can noght se the rihte weie.
> (I, 1049)

The explosive force of love has threatened the cohesiveness of a whole community, forcing each member to reveal his essential moral quality. The community has been held together and the damage minimized by a combination of restraint and rationality on the part of the injured, with a firm and accurate distribution of justice tempered by pity on the part of the ruler. In some ways Gower works within very narrow limits. Patterns reappear. His basic strategy of understatement, respect for restraint, and exploitation of the dramatic possibilities of silence leads to strikingly similar behavior among characters in similar situations. The seduction of Paulina (I, 908) and the rapes of Philomena (V, 5635) and Lucrece (V, 3640) are described in similar terms. Paulina, Rosemund, and Progne all react to a realization of the wrong that has been done to them with initial and emphatic silence (Cf. V, 5790; I, 2570; I, 952). The concern of Paulina's husband for her welfare is duplicated by Collatin's anxiety over Lucrece.

Yet Gower is not mechanically repeating himself. Each scene maintains its individuality and effectiveness. For example, an examination of the conversation of Collatin, Lucrece, and her father demonstrates the freshness of his vision.

> And he, which fain wolde understonde
> The cause why sche ferde so,
> With softe wordes axeth tho,
> 'What mai you be, mi good swete?'
> And sche, which thoghte hirself unmete
> And the lest worth of wommen alle,
> Hire woful chiere let doun falle
> For schame and couthe unnethes loke.
> And thei therof good hiede toke,
> And preiden hire in alle weie
> That sche ne spare forto seie
> Unto her frendes what hire eileth,
> Why sche so sore hirself beweileth,
> And what the sothe wold mene.
> And sche, which hath hire sorwes grene,
> Hire wo to telle thanne assaieth,
> Bot tendre schame hire word delaieth,
> That sondri times as sche minte
> To speke, upon the point sche stinte.
> And thei hire bidden evere in on
> To telle forth, and therupon,
> Whan that sche sih sche moste nede,
> Hire tale betwen schame and drede
> Sche tolde, noght withoute peine.
> And he, which wolde hire wo restreigne,
> Hire housebonde, a sory man,
> Conforteth hire al that he can,
> And swor, and ek hire fader bothe,
> That thei with hire be noght wrothe
> Of that is don ayein hire wille;
> And preiden hire to be stille,
> For thei to hire have al foryive.
> (VII, 5026)

Gower has carefully shaped the scene to express his unique view of this familiar old story. He took the tale from Ovid (Fasti II, 687-852) who had faithfully interpreted the original Roman ideal of honor. To the Romans

Lucrece's suicide was dramatic evidence of her heroic commitment to a noble, Stoic virtue. Ovid describes her as that "matron of manly courage" who, at the very moment of expiring, "moved her lightless eyes and seemed by the stirring of her hair to ratify" Brutus' vow of vengeance.[40] Chaucer, in his version of the Legend of Good Women, bathes the story in a gentler ambience but by stressing Lucrece's steadfastness in love and concern for her husband's honor, maintains the exemplary tradition.

The context of Gower's tale is a discussion of the disruptive effects on a community of a ruler's inability to exercise sexual restraint. Consequently, Gower has little interest in glorifying Lucrece as either an example of antique virtue or of romantic fidelity. In sharp contrast to Ovid he sees her as a pathetic victim rather than as a heroic exemplar. To his fashioning of this interpretation he has brought his usual power of discrimination and all of his considerable technical skill. For example, his ability to select those details most appropriate to his purpose is evident in the rape scene. Ovid describes Lucrece as trembling like a "little lamb that, caught straying from the fold, lies low under

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[40] illa iacens ad verba oculos sine lumine movit
viasaque concussa dicta probare coma.
fertur in exequias animi matrona virilis
et secum lacrimas invidiamque trahit.
(Fasti II, 845)

a ravening wolf."[41] Despite her fear, Arrons can only overcome her resistance by threatening to kill her and leave beside her body a dead slave as false evidence of her adultery. "Overcome by fear of infamy, the dame gave way."[42] Gower retains the lamb and wolf figure, but uses it to emphasize the fragility of his Lucrece.

> Which thurgh tendresce of wommanhiede
> Hire vois hath lost for pure drede,
> That o word speke sche ne dar:
> (VII, 4975)

His villain does not have to resort to the elaborate threat of Ovid's Arrons. Terror suffices to crush the victim's power of resistance.

> Wherof sche swounede in his hond,
> And, as who seith, lay ded oppressed
> (VII, 4986)

As her family tries to comfort her, Gower emphasizes her relationship to her husband and father and their total concern for her welfare. In their uninhibited expression of love, charity and pity have pre-empted wounded vanity and offended family pride. The result is a passage of great pathos still capable of engaging our sympathy. The consistency and clarity of Gower's purpose is evident in every detail of this passage. Ovid informs us that Lucrece

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[41] sed tremit, ut quondam stabulis deprensa relictis
parva sub infesto cum iacet agna lupo.
(Fasti II, 799)

[42] succubuit famae victa puella metu
(Fasti II, 810)

attempted three times to speak before finally succeeding. Gower shows us father and husband in three attempts to persuade her to talk. These three requests subtly but firmly structure the scene into a pattern of grief and response as well as insuring that father and husband are not assigned to the background. The complementary epithets which describe husband and wife are almost distributed in a formal pattern. Collatin is "he, which fain wolde understonde" and later "he, which wolde hire wo restreigne". Nine lines later she is "sche, which hath hire sorwes grene." Seventeen lines after she is "sche which thoghte noght to live." In husband and father's persistent efforts to gain her confidence there is not the slightest hint of coercion. They "ask," "prey," and "bid" in the gentle, tender tones of courtly suitors.

> With softe wordes axeth tho,
> "What mai you be, mi goode swete?"

They pay attention to every gesture. "And thei therof good hiede toke." They insist that they are "hir frendes" and her husband "a sory man,/ Conforteth hire al that he can".

The passage contains fifteen different sibilants not including "sche": soft, sweete, schame, spare, say, sore, southe, sorwes, sondre, speake, stint, sih, sorry, swore, stille. These are operative terms that could serve as a precis of the scene. Sibilants have a tendency to hiss. But Gower has carefully avoided harsh combinations.

Instead, by skillfully threading them through the passage he makes them whisper in such a way as to bind the lines and reinforce the mood of pathos and tenderness.

This mood colours the suicide itself. Her justification is consistent with that given by Ovid's heroine.

> And seide, of thilke wickednesse
> Which was unto hire bodi wroght,
> Al were it so sche myhte it noght,
> Nevere afterward the world ne schal
> Reproeven hire;
> (VII, 5060)

But her act has little in common with that of Ovid's manly matron whose fierce, fanatical devotion to an abstract code of honor converts suicide into a method of counterattack. It is rather the act of a thoroughly feminine, distraught and defeated woman.

Ovid's rendering of this scene is high pitched. Father and husband add to the impression of general hysteria. "On this side and on that her father and her spouse did soothe her grief and pray her to tell, and in blind fear they wept and quaked."[43] Gower's quieter key enables him to exploit the contrast with the rape scene. Violence has caused Lucrece to be silent and left her in a state of inarticulate hysteria. Verbalization consequently becomes essential in the unsuccessful attempt

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[43] hinc pater, hinc coniunx lacrimas solantur et orant
indicet, et caeco flentque paventque metu.
(Fasti II, 821)

to heal. Conversation, by definition uncoerced and mutual, becomes the only means by which her burden can be shared.

"Lucrece" is one of Gower's best tales, but there are others of equal interest. Obviously, this discussion has barely tapped the vast wealth of the Confessio. It has been concerned to show that collectively the tales project an authentic poetic vision. Each tale focuses on some aspect of the central concern of this vision, the relation of man and nature. All are concerned with the power of love, nature's animating agent. This force is basically good yet has vast potential for disruption. Nature itself has a tendency to mitigate the pain caused by human failures to cope with her energy. This tendency is duplicated in society as individuals try to meet the irruptions of passion with grace, restraint, and charity.

CHAPTER III

AMANS I

This chapter is primarily concerned with several crucial problems relating to Amans and his function in the poem, specifically: the nature of the art of love taught him by Genius, Amans as a persona and pivot on which the swing from didacticism is effected, and the structural relation of lover, lore, and tales. However, it is essential to the proportion of my argument to keep before us a sense of Gower's artistry in the portrait as well as the nature of the passion that possesses Amans. Therefore, although the portrait has been universally admired, even by those critics who hold a low opinion of Gower's achievement as a poet, and although it would be presumptuous to pretend to improve on C. S. Lewis' appreciation, I will begin by briefly considering the portrait itself.[44]

By "portrait" we usually mean the total impression of Amans created throughout the narrative. A critic, in attempting to communicate a sense of this impression,

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[44] Allegory of Love.

is strongly tempted to compose his own mosaic from details sifted out of the whole poem. This is a convenient and possibly unavoidable method but it is followed at a price. Gower treats details with care and precision but he composes in larger units. Thus, while his control of the couplet is firm, an accurate measure of the effectiveness of his verse can be obtained only from the larger unit, or verse paragraph. Likewise, the individual details of the lover's life are meticulously woven into a number of miniature portraits. The portrait of the lover as a whole is really an impression created by the cumulative effect of these smaller panels. Since a consideration of them is one of the most efficient means to an appreciation of Gower's art, I will quote one in full.

> Mi fader, evere yit er this
> In every place, in every stede,
> What so mi lady hath me bede,
> With al myn herte obedient
> I have therto be diligent.
> And if so is sche bidde noght,
> What thing that thenne into my thoght
> Comth ferst of that I mai suffise,
> I bowe and profre my servise,
> Sometime in chambre, sometime in halle,
> Right as I se the times falle.
> And whan sche goth to hiere masse,
> That time schal noght overpasse,
> That I naproche hir ladihede,
> In aunter if I mai hire lede
> Unto the chapelle and ayein.
> ....
> I serve, I bowe, I loke, I loute,
> Min yhe folweth hire aboute,
> What so sche wole so wol I,
> Whan sche wol sitte, I knele by,

And whan sche stant, than wol I stonde:
And whan sche takth hir werk on honde
Of wevinge or embrouderie
Than can I noght but muse and prie
Upon hir fingres longe and smale,
And now I thenke, and now I tale,
And now I singe, and now I sike,
And this mi contienance I pike.
And if it falle, as for a time
Hir liketh noght abide bime,
Bot besien hire on other thinges,
Thar make I othre tariinges
To dreche forth the longe dai,
For me is loth departe away.
And thanne I am so simple of port,
That forto feigne som desport
I pleie with hire litel hound
Now on the bedd, now on the ground,
Now with hir briddes in the cage;
For ther is non so litel page,
Ne yit so simple a chamberere,
That I ne make hem alle chere,
Al for thei scholde speke wel:
Thus mow ye sen mi besi whiel,
That goth noght ydeliche aboute.
And if hir list to riden oute
On pelrinage or other stede,
I come, thogh I be noght bede,
And take hire in min arm alofte
And sette hir in hire sadel softe,
And so forth lede hire be the bridel,
For that I wolde noght ben ydel.
(IV, 1120)

This is one of the things Gower can do best, a perfect example of what C. S. Lewis meant by his "devotion to movement and progression, his preoccupation with things that change as you watch them."[45] The concern with movement is evident in both the actions described and the rapidity of narration. Almost every line has a verb, sometimes a series:

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[45] Ibid., p. 207.

I serve, I bowe, I loke, I loute,
Min yhe folweth hire aboute.

The second line contains only one verb, but by reminding us that the lady as well as the lover's eyes are active, it puts the whole scene in motion. Noting the absence of visual metaphors, Lewis suggests that "In so far as he approximates to the visible arts at all, it is a cinematograph rather than a painting that he suggests."[46]

This is an accurate account of both the nature of Gower's imagery and the flashback effect conveyed by the passage, an effect appropriate to a confession in which Amans is recalling and reliving his life as a lover. In this life the pattern woven out of the minutiae of a hundred trivial daily acts colored by a rhythm of hope and despair is more important than any single event.

The terms "miniature" and "portrait" are frequently applied loosely to literature. However, in this case the metaphors are more than ordinarily appropriate. This is not to say that a search for a scientific or overly precise correlation between the pictorial and verbal media, such as the location of narrative values in a picture or spacial values in a poem, is in this case relevant. Lewis' descriptions are valid. But the relationship between the arts was unusually intimate in the court of Richard II who, as a connoisseur and patron, originally

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[46] Ibid., p. 208.

commissioned the Confessio.[47] The influence of this milieu is evident in the lavish decoration and illustration of the first manuscripts which were probably prepared under the supervision of Gower himself in the scriptorium at Southwark. Some of the early manuscripts seem to have merited the attention of Scheer, the period's finest painter of illuminations.[48] Some of these illustrations, as Professor Bennett has pointed out, are of scenes commonly illustrated in the Romance of the Rose, but a marked difference in tone points to a conscious effort to make pictures and text harmonize.[49] This effort was encouraged by a tendency to regard a book as a precious artifact in which text and illustration were mutually reinforcing, and to which identical standards of craftsmanship, precision and artistry applied. Gower's verbal portraits, like miniature illuminations, invite the reader to linger in contemplation of both content and craftsmanship. Like the illuminations they have an integral and definite relationship to the text as a whole, yet are capable of delighting the casual browser as much

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[47]Gervase Mathew, The Court of Richard II (London, 1968). On the relationship of the art of the miniature to the text, see John V. Fleming, The Roman de la Rose: A Study in Allegory and Iconography (Princeton, 1969).

[48]Gereth M. Spriggs, "Unnoticed Bodleian MSS Illuminated by Herman Scheerre and His School," Bodleian Library Record, VII (1964), pp. 193-203.

[49]Selections, p. xxii.

as the serious student. Collectively they compose the poem's most precious resource.

Of course, these miniatures are not self-sufficient for Gower does nave a tale to tell. It is not a narrative as we ordinarily think of it in medieval romance. He gives us nothing equivalent to the complicated intrigue of Chaucer's Troilus. Instead of exotic places and heroic deeds we have an ordinary life. External events are significant only to the degree that they are illuminated by the lover's passion. What is of greatest importance occurs within his consciousness. Even the conclusion, which has received so much attention, is an internal crisis, not, as in the Romance of the Rose, a physical event. For the real substance of the narrative is the gradual unfolding of Amans' passion and his education in the art of love.

An attempt to define the nature of this passion finds its first obstacle in Gower's art. Amans is rendered so delicately, so perfectly, and with such apparent ease that commentary seems superfluous. It is of course possible to approach him as Professor Dodd has, as a study in the use of conventions.[50] Yet to anyone at all sympathetic to Gower's poetic sensibility the sterile reductionism of Dodd's study is self-evident.

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[50] W. G. Dodd, Courtly Love in Chaucer and Gower (Boston, 1913).

However, his somewhat mechanical catalogue does remind us that readers of medieval love literature will find much that is familiar in the presentation of Amans. Since this body of material has been partly responsible for Gower's reputation for conventionality, a reminder of certain common sense, yet frequently ignored, limitations on its usefulness is appropriate.

There are at least three reservations to be kept in mind in talking about conventions. The first is that while there undoubtedly are conventions, it is frequently difficult to distinguish a purely literary convention from what is part of the actual social usage of the time. Much tea is consumed in Victorian novels. Is this mandated by literature or is it the normal routine of a Victorian household? Obviously, a formula can be both. There is no problem, unless we are trying to demonstrate an author's lack of imagination, as long as we recognize that something that has appeared frequently in previous works can simultaneously be an accurate reflection of the real world.

The second caution is a recognition that any convention, even if identifiable, can be used to express a wide range of sentiments. Troilus and Absolon both suffer from the lover's malady. But the quality of their respective loves and longings is certainly not identical. No theory of courtly love will enable us to give an <u>a priori</u>

definition of the nature and quality of any particular lover's story. Finally, even if we could determine its species, we could not predict the artistic level of its particular embodiment. This principle is self-evident, yet critics who would never dismiss a medieval painting as merely "another madonna and child" have consistently failed to apply it to the Confessio.

A consideration of a passage from the "miniature" quoted above will make this clear.

> For ther is non so litel page,
> Ne yit so simple a chamberere,
> That I ne make hem alle chere,
> Al for thei scholde speke wel.

Ovid's advice on the necessity of tipping the servants is repeated by Andreas and Jean de Meun. But any reader who passed puberty during those far-off days when bashfulness was still common enough to make the favor of any of a beloved's intimates something to be sought for will also recognize the social roots of the advice. Consistency with precedents in earlier literary works does not destroy its validity as an accurate reflection of social reality. Moreover, it should be noted that Amans is not coarse or cynical enough actually to offer money. The effectiveness of the detail is increased by the casualness with which it is dropped into the narrative. It is also perfectly consistent with Amans' character, for he repeatedly displays an eager concern for detail.

The love that possesses Amans is a complex phenomenon. In his own mind it is distinguished from the trivial and commonplace affairs in which he has been accustomed to indulge.

> I seie noght I am gylteles
> That I am somdel delicate:
> For elles were I fulli mat,
> Bot if that I som lusti stounde
> Of confort and of ese founde,
> To take of love som repast;
> Min hunger otherwise I kiele
> Of smale lustes whiche I pike,
> And for a time yit thei like;
> If that ye wisten what I mene.
> (VI, 728)

This is not to say that his new love is devoid of sensuality. At times it is expressed with a humorous naivete:

> Mi fader, who that hath his love
> Abedde naked be his syde,
> And wolde thanne hise yhen hyde
> With Slep, I not what man is he:
> Bot certes as touchende of me,
> That fell me nevere yet er this.
> (IV, 3275)

At other times it is expressed in verse vibrant with the energy of "love buillende on the fyr/ With fantasie and with desir," (VI, 915) as in the exquisite description of his courting:

> Whan I, that mai noght fiele hir bare,
> Mai lede hire clothed in myn arm:
> Bot afterward it doth me harm
> Of pure ymaginacioun;
> For thanne this collacioun
> I make unto miselven ofte,
> And seie, 'Ha lord, hou sche is softe,
> Hou sche is round, hou sche is smal!
> Nou wolde god I hadde hire al
> Withoute danger at mi wille!
> (IV, 1140)

But the sensuality implies nothing improper, for Amans is convinced that "Thilke love is wel at ese/ Which set is upon mariage" (IV, 1476). The honorable nature of his intentions is empathetically asserted elsewhere.

> If I that tresor mihte gete,
> I scholde nevere be foryete
> That I ne wolde it faste holde
> Til god of love himselve wolde
> That deth ous scholde parte atuo.
> (V, 69)

But it is not the goal which distinguished this love from simple carnal desire as much as it is the quality of the emotion itself. This passion possesses and illuminates his whole being. Amans expresses the preciousness of his love in the exquisite use of the tree-root image.

> For lich unto the greene tree,
> If that men take his rote aweie
> Riht so myn herte scholde deie
> If that me love be withdrawe.
> (IV, 2680)

Like every lover he has his moments of despair and sees himself as the hapless victim of fortune's caprices.

> For whan mi fortune overcasteth
> Hire whiel and is to me so strange,
> And that I se sche wol noght change
> Than caste I al the world aboute,
> And thenke hou I at home and oute
> Have al my time in vein despended.
> (III, 1136)

These moments of despair are compensated for by intangible but priceless rewards.

For whan I se hir goodli face
And thenke upon hire hihe pris,
As thogh I were in Paradis,
I am so ravisht of the syhte,
That speke unto hire I ne myhte
As for the time, thogh I wolde.
(IV, 680)

When his mistress commands him to court another he finds it impossible to obey.

For also wel sche myhte seie
'Go tak the Mone ther it sit'
As bringe that into my wit:
For ther was nevere rooted tre
That stod so fast in his degre,
That I ne stonde more faste
Upon hire love, and mai noght caste
Min herte awey, although I wolde.
(I, 1316)

This love is the meaning of Amans' life and consequently the theme of joy is frequent and vibrant.

Me thenkth I mai me more avaunce,
If I mai gon upon hir hond,
Thanne if I wonne a kinges lond.
For whanne I mai hire hand beclippe,
With such gladnesse I daunce and skippe,
Me thenkth I touche noght the flor;
The Ro, which renneth on the Mor,
Is thanne noght so lyht as I:
(IV, 2780)

Yes -- Amans seems to re-enact scenes long familiar in courtly literature. He sings and dances, sighs and cries, despairs and hopes. But in following the record of his travail it would be wise to keep in mind C. S. Lewis' words on Gower and convention:

> Gower is not the slave of any mere convention. When he conforms, his heart goes with it. When he writes a full-lenght paean in the praise of Love
>
> "It makth curteis of the vilein, etc."
>
> he repeats what his predecessors have said. But he wishes to repeat it, and is not the less a poet because he agrees with the common experience of gentle hearts.[51]

AMANS II

The narrative is not simply a series of sighs and plaints. It is the record of Amans' education in the art of love, and to understand this process we must make explicit the ideal of love implicit in Genius' teaching. In Chapter I, I pointed out that Genius' teaching did not always harmonize with attitudes expressed in the Vox and Mirour. However, this discrepancy does not preclude a general moral consistency to his preaching. Derek Pearsall asserts that

> from his discourse there emerges a pattern by which restraint, discrimination, and 'gentillese' in love become the example and analogue of virtuous behavior generally, so that sin is exposed as base, unreasonable, and stupid, rather than condemned as deadly.[52]

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[51] Allegory of Love, p. 215.

[52] "Gower's Narrative Art," p. 476.

Pearsall is sympathetic but actually the moral point of view is harder than his description implies.

Amans looks to Genius not only as a confessor but as a teacher of the art of love.

> I am evere curious
> Of hem that conne best enforme
> To knowe and witen al the forme,
> What falleth unto loves craft.
> (IV, 922)

Genius stresses repeatedly that love is a discipline requiring great and constant effort.

> For who that wolde have al his reste
> And do no travail at the nede,
> It is no resoun that he spede
> In loves cause forto winne,
> (IV, 2690)

Amans is anxious to know how to gain possession of his lady's favor. However, the emphasis of Genius' remarks falls on another note. In his remarks on the story of Acis and Galatea, an exemplum of envy as a form of possessiveness, the basic theme is made explicit.

> And thus algate,
> Mi sone, thou myht understonde,
> That if thou wolt in grace stonde
> With love, thou most leve Envie:
> And as thou wolt for thi partie
> Toward thi love stonde fre,
> So most thou soffre an other be,
> What so befalle upon the chaunce:
> For it is an unwys vengance,
> Which to non other man is lief,
> And is unto himself grief.
> (II, 200)

The theme is the need to respect the freedom and integrity of the loved one: "So, most thou soffre an

other be." To love well one must accept the possibility that one will not be loved in turn. This rule is absolute. However, it is not the arbitrary and capricious rule of some tyrannical lord of love. On the contrary, it is grounded in profound moral and psychological principles built into the very definition of love. It must be obeyed for the same reason that the laws of gravity must be followed. Sin is its own punishment. Any attempt to take by force what must be given freely detroys what is being sought. This is not a rare or isolated statement but is brought home to the lover throughout the poem. In the discussion of wrath, Amans is told that

> Love axeth pes and evere schal,
> And who that fihteth most withal
> Schal lest conquere of his emprise.
> (III, 1647)

and a little later

> Mi Sone, thou miht understonde,
> To hasten love is thing in vein,
> What that fortune is therayein.
> To take where aman hath leve
> Good is and elles he mot leve;
> For whan a mannes happes failen,
> Ther is non haste mai availen.
> (III, 1721)

Fortune is ordinarily used to express the arbitrariness and vanity of human effort. Here paradoxically it expresses the necessity of learning to live and accept the freedom implicit in the definition of love. The lover is not commanded to give up the passion that possesses him. He is commanded to resist the impulse to satisfy the passion without restraint or regard for the impulses of the loved one.

In the discussion of avarice (Book V) after a long analysis of gold's power to possess and wreck the human heart...

> For what man thilke vice suie,
> He get himself bot litel reste.
> For hou so that the body reste,
> The herte upon the gold travaileth
> Whom many a nyhtes drede assaileth;
> For thogh he ligge abedde naked,
> His herte is everemore awaked,
> (V, 418)

Genius makes the application to love:

> And riht so in the same wise,
> If thou thiself wolt wel avise,
> Ther be lovers of suche ynowe,
> That wole unto no reson bowe.
> If so be that thei come above,
> Whan thei ben maistres of here love,
> And that thei scholden be most glad,
> With love thei ben most bestad,
> So fain thei wolde it holden al.
> Here herte, here yhe is overal,
> And wenen every man be thief,
> To stele awey that hem is lief;
> Thus thurgh here oghne fantasie
> Thei fallen into Jelousie.
> Than heth the Schip tobroke his cable,
> With every wynd and is muable.
> (V, 429)

Jealousy had long been a concern of the literature of love, the subject of debates on whether it fostered or threatened true love. Gower has no use for such frivolous pastimes. He goes right to the psychological root of the vice in a man's own lack of confidence in his masculinity.

> Among the men lacke of manhode
> In Mariage upon wifhode
> Makth that a man himself deceiveth,
> Wherof it is that he conceiveth
> That ilke unsely maladie,
> The which is cleped Jelousie:
> (V, 455)

Gower's answer to the question of the compatibility of love and jealousy would be an unequivocal no. He goes on to catalogue the manifestations of the disease and to demonstrate its incompatibility with a decent relationship (V, 460-620). The jealous husband torments himself and in turn torments his spouse, attempts to control her every movement and, by turning every occasion for pleasure or joy into misery, to reduce her to absolute submission.

The desire to possess another human being totally that is characteristic of jealousy is complemented by "coveitise," a term applied to the lover who can find something to love in anyone. His possessive instincts are turned outwards but still act on others as objects, not persons.

> And thus he set him to coveite,
> And hundred thogh he sihe aday.
> So wolde he more thanne he may;
> ...
> So hath his lust no juggement
> Whom covoitise of love blent.
> Him thenkth that to his covoitise
> Hou al the world ne mai suffise,
> For be his wille he wolde have alle,
> If that it mihte so bifalle:
> Thus is he commun as the Strete,
> I sette noght of his beyete.
> (V, 2462)

This same condemnation of an anarchic, omnivorous libido characteristic of the unintegrated and egotistic self is stated in Book VI in terms of delicacy, the inability to resist the possibility of a new sensation.

For though he hadde to his hond
The best wif of al the lond,
Or the faireste love of alle,
Yet wolde his herte on othre falle
And thenke hem mor delicious
Than he hath in his oghne hous.
(VI, 667)

Amans, of course, is not likely to be guilty of such gross and obvious transgressions. But he still has difficulty in grasping the incomparability of love, the necessity to accept the unconditional freedom of the other. He is willing to undergo love's hardship. But his submissive posture cannot completely cloak his ultimate reliance on the force of his own will. He will suffer only as a means to attain his ultimate reward and insists on valuing that reward in terms of his efforts instead of his lady's unique value. The Confessor answers, not to counsel patience, but to challenge the very terms of Amans' pursuit.

Sche mai be such, that hire o lok
Is worth thin herte manyfold;
So hast thou wel thin herte sold,
Whan thou hast that is more worth.
And ek of that thou tellest forth,
Hou that hire weyht of love enevene
Is unto thin, under the hevene
Stod nevere in evene that balance
Which stant in love's governance.
Such is the statut of his lawe,
That thogh thi love more drawe
And peise in the balance more,
Thou miht noght axe ayein therfore
Of duete, bot al of grace.
(V, 4542)

The fusion of moral rigor and artistic sensibility characteristic of Gower's ars amatoria can best be

appreciated by considering it against the rich general background of medieval love poetry. At one time critics questioned the propriety of joining the Seven Sins to a discussion of love, suggesting artistic ineptness on the part of Gower. Such an a priori judgment is no longer possible. The seeming incongruity has been revealed to be a modern prejudice. Gower was not the first to use the Seven Sins as an organizing frame for a literary work.[53] Dante was only his most illustrious predecessor. The Seven Deadly Sins provide an amazingly comprehensive system for organizing a vision of life, cataloguing with unusual completeness the ethical and spiritual extremes of life on earth. Its attractiveness as an organizing principle for a work the size of the Confessio is obvious.

Likewise sanction in literary tradition for an exploitation of the analogy between orthodox religion and the cult of love no longer needs demonstration. Almost every aspect of church rite and doctrine had, in the preceding centuries, been incorporated into the literature of love. The practice was particularly popular among the French court poets writing under the influence of the Romance of the Rose and known to both Chaucer and

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[53]John J. McNally, "The Penitential and Courtly Tradition in Gower's Confessio Amantis," in Studies in Medieval Culture, ed. John R. Sommerfeldt, Western University (Michigan, 1964), pp. 74-94.

Gower. The propriety of the practice to a medieval poet was both self-evident (due to the naturalness of the analogical mode) and sanctioned by tradition. Gower, however, did make significant innovations. His major marks are the joining of a formal confession to the Seven Sins and the use of this structure as a frame for a collection of stories.[54] These innovations in themselves would not be signs of a distinctive vision. On the contrary, they could be interpreted as evidence of mere ingenuity and, in fact, have been so regarded. This interpretation does not, however, stand up under an examination of the real issues: Why did Gower choose the Seven Sins? Is it simply another adaptation or has he used it to say something different?

To answer this we must take another look at the relation of erotic to religious terminology. The language of love and the language of religion are universal and natural allies, an alliance unrestricted to the Middle Ages, because grounded in related psychic realities. The language of love seems as indispensable to the description of the mystic's vision as the terms of religion to a description of erotic ecstasy. That medieval poets should adopt the rituals and vocabulary of the Church is therefore not strange. The point at which religious and erotic ecstasy blend is only one end of the spectrum of experience

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[54] J. H. Jacobson, The Church of Love in the Works of Chaucer and Gower, unpublished doctoral dissertation (Yale, 1939).

expressed in religious terminology. It could be used to describe the actual details of physical intimacy as in the Romance of the Rose or to elaborate the more refined but equally earth-bound rituals of sophisticated flirtation and courtship. The extent of its application was dependent only on the ingenuity of the poet. The vocabulary can be the spontaneous, inevitable expression of an intense experience or the elaborately, intellectually thought-out construction of a trained rhetorician. In the latter it lends itself conceptually to certain common themes such as the submissive posture of the lover, the lady's exalted worth, and the ennobling effects of love. But both the force and attractiveness of the vocabulary are in its aptness for the expression or assertion of intensity. It performs the function of hyperbole.

It should be evident from my discussion that Gower's use of religious apparatus differs radically in purpose and effect from that of his predecessors. His choice of symbolism is indicative of the difference. Amans frequently expresses his sense of the lady's high worth and the intensity of his passion. But the primary purpose of the Seven Sins is not to express the intensity of Amans' emotion. Gover is not exploiting the analogies between two dissimilars. He is not making one set of conventions serve another, possibly hostile or contradictory,

master.[55] He is not subverting a system of meaning.

In complete consistency with the qualities that earned him the title "moral," Gower selected that aspect of the ecclesiastical apparatus most directly and explicitly concerned with man's moral nature, his conduct in this world, and conversely the aspect least amenable to the expression of love's mystery and intensity. The Confessio is, of course, deeply concerned with both, but the Seven Sins lend themselves less easily to the expression of passion than a scheme based on the Mass or the Sacraments. In his handling of this system, as I have shown, Gower gives a traditional statement of the nature of the sin. He then attempts to apply this principle to the problem of loving. It is possible that at times the application is awkward, but it is important to note that the key term is "apply" not "substitute". The force of the application to love derives n part from maintaining the integrity of the original. Gower extends: he does not simply borrow or appropriate. He thus succeeds in connecting the experience of love to a larger frame embracing all of life, moving from love outward into the wider life of humanity.

The two traditions mutually enrich each other, and this mutuality is felt throughout the Confessio.

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[55]Alexander J. Denomy, The Heresy of Courtly Love (New York, 1947).

But it is not only to be felt subliminally, for like most items of importance to Gower it is somewhere made explicit. In his discussion of "foolhaste" Genius insists that the principle applies not to love only.

> Noght only upon loves chance,
> Bot upon every governance
> Which falleth unto mannes dede,
> Folhaste is evere forto drede.
> (III, 1739)

And similarly in his discussion of jealousy (V, 600) he defines the similarity between jealousy and avarice in terms of their identical psychological workings.

This analysis should put us in a position to define with some precision the place of the Confessio within the tradition of the ars amatoria. Gower was conscious of writing in that tradition and chooses the doctrine of the ennobling power of love as the point at which to make the connection explicit.

> For evere yit it hath be so,
> That love honeste in sondri weie
> Profiteth, for it doth aweie
> The vice, and as the bokes sein,
> It makth curteis of the vilein,
> And to the couard hardiesce
> It yifth, so that verrai prouesse
> Is caused upon loves reule
> To him that can manhode reule;
> (IV, 2296)

The courtly tradition had always insisted on the ennobling power of love and buttressed this insistence by the implication that the virtues and vices of the erotic order were interchangeable with those of the

religious. To be a good man one had to be a good lover for love was the source of all the virtues. This is certainly an attractive doctrine whose actual deficiency in hard ethical content has not lessened its appeal or its historical and cultural importance. However, the exact nature of the edification brought about is vague. Lewis claimed that Andreas "had extended the erotic code so that it almost coincided with the real ethical code."[56] Despite the "almost" qualification this seems to me to credit Andreas, and the code as it was developed up to Gower, with more than it actually accomplished. Andreas' art of love is as much a courtesy book as an ethical treatise. Advice on dress and manners exists on an equal basis with commandments of genuine moral cogency. Andreas and his successors were elaborating an ideal of aristocratic and chivalric behavior. It articulated an ideal of refinement rather than a code of hard moral imperatives. While it attempted to make adherence to the code a moral imperative, it seems to me that the code itself is more aesthetic than ethical. This is not to denigrate the intrinsic value of the ideal. Restraint, refinement, gracious behavior, certainly are not to be sneered at. It is to point out that the code is more concerned with manners, style, and public role than with universal ethical principles.

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[56] Allegory of Love, p. 199.

The ethical basis of the code becomes clearer when we recall the motivation behind it. The formal arts of love, those of Ovid, Andreas, and Jean de Meun, are essentially manuals of seduction. The aim is to conquer. Thetone is cynical and amoral. The girl is an object to be possessed and abandoned. The pursuit takes place in isolation from any of the fuller legitimate aspects of life and society, in opposition to anything that might be termed the "common profit".[57] These works are not the only expression of medieval ideals of love. Certainly Guillaume de Lorris is not devoid of tenderness and sensitivity. Moreover, in poetry at least, many lovers were willing to settle for less than complete physical satisfaction. But there are many possible objects in seduction, and there is no doubt but that the virtues nurtured by love were cultivated the more to shine in the eyes of the beloved, i.e., the object is to gain the favor of the beloved, even though a wide range in expression of that favor was common.

Gower certainly has no intention of rejecting the aesthetic dimension in the ideal of love elaborated by

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[57] I am aware of, if unsympathetic to, attempts to interpret these works as ironic. Whatever the ultimate purpose my argument is unaffected, for there is agreement on the surface characteristics of these works. See: Fleming; Charles Dahlberg, "Love and the Roman de la Rose," Speculum, XLIV (1969), pp. 568-584; D. W. Robertson, Jr., A Preface to Chaucer (Princeton, 1962).

preceding generations of poets. Restraint, refinement, good manners, are intrinsic to his value system. They are, however, more than a manner of gracefully conducting oneself in polite society. While Genius endorses the specifically chivalric benefits of love, i.e., its incitement to valor, this is qualified by Amans' smiling response.

It is possible to interpret the Confessio as a repudiation of that strain of the tradition exemplified by Ovid, Andreas, and Jean de Meun. We have already mentioned the unequivocal repudiation of jealousy. Adultery is vehemently rejected and all its accoutrements. Amans is enjoined from following the example of those who practice "Stealth" and "Michery" and:

> For love awaiteth evere and casteth
> Hou he mai stele and cacche his preie,
> Whan he therto mai finde a weie.
> (V, 6548)

This, in spite of its almost obligatory presence in a love story, reinforced by its commandment in the standard manuals. Conspicuous by their absence are both "Amis" and "La Vielle", both obligatory in an illicit pursuit. "False-Semblant" is vigorously attacked (II, 1880-2145).

Andreas had advocated the use of force if one accidentally fell in love with an unwilling peasant. Gower's sense of the reality behind this cynicism is nowhere more vivid than in his discussion of rape (V, 6100).

The hunting lord has taken advantage of a shepherdess. Gower focuses not on the event itself but on the loving wife at home and the lord's return feigning cheer and love, expressing as only Gower's understatement and indirection can the shoddiness and debasing effect of sin on human relations.

To the functions of the Seven Sins already discussed, another, of equal importance, can be added: the assertion of an ideal of love. Amans, like every lover, is obsessed with gaining the favor of his lady. Genius certainly does not reject this goal as evil. But he patiently and persistently stresses that respect, not possession, is the essence of love. Respect means the recognition of the autonomy and freedom of the beloved, combined with an unwavering determination to resist the temptation to manipulate and to treat as an object. In the expression of this ideal the Seven Sins function as more than a frame. In fact, they make up the moral marrow of the poem. By applying this system to an analysis of love Gower increased not the poem's intensity but its moral depth. It enabled him to articulate an ideal of love which repudiated the meaner aspects of the courtly tradition, especially as manifest in the ars amatoria as it descended from Ovid through Andreas and Jean de Meun. To what was sound, beautiful and noble in the tradition it gave an unequalled ethical and

psychological depth and toughness; consequently, a strength and seriousness not approximated in previous formulations of the ideal of love's ennobling power. This is possibly more than Gower intended when he set out to write a book "somewhat of lust somewhat of lore." What he achieved was a genuine integration.

AMANS III

The Confessio opens with a declaration of the narrator's intention to give us a direct account of his own experience.

> ... and therefore I
> Woll wryte and schewe al openly
> How love and I togedre mette.
> (I, 83)

It closes with the identification of the narrator as John Gower. The first person narrative is obviously the most appropriate voice for a confession and in itself is not to be taken as proof that the narrative is a literal account of the author's adventures. Nevertheless, the récit is so convincing as a testament of personal experience that the temptation, strongly reinforced by the identification of Amans and Gower in the conclusion, to take it as autobiography is strong. The question has significant implications for our understanding of the nature of the Confessio.

If Gower has created in Amans a *persona*, it is considerably less obvious than Chaucer's. Chaucer's narrator is one of his most brilliant comic creations. The exact effects of the playoff between this character and the solid practical diplomat, courtier, man of affairs, that the records indicate the historical Chaucer to have been, remains a matter of pleasant speculation. There is little doubt that this contrast provided a source of pleasure to those privileged to hear him read his own tales that we can only envy. The absurdity of attempting to identify author and *persona* has long been evident.

We have as little knowledge of Gower as of the historical Chaucer. However, we happen to have the same type of knowledge and it is appropriate to pose the same question concerning its relation to Amans. Is the portrait of Amans consistent with "Moral Gower," the stern keeper of the realm's and King's consciences, the political philosopher, endower of schools and monasteries, solid property owner, shrewd real estate investor, the man Chaucer entrusted with power of attorney? The question is almost self-answering. Consistent with Gower's effort to create an illusion of verisimilitude in the confession, Amans is less obviously comic than the Chaucer of either the *House of Fame* or the *Canterbury Tales*. However, Amans, like Chaucer's narrator, has a capacity for appearing slightly inept and ridiculous.

Gower's sense of humor is evident in other parts of the Confessio, but it is when directed at Amans that the gap between the real and the fictional is most apparent and the basis of the narrative in a shared convention is most evident. The traditional lover was distinguished by his humility and lamentation for his lack of success. Chaucer carries this one step further in the depiction of a narrator who continually protests his lack of experience. In the Troilus, in addition to the narrator, Pandarus is conspicuously and humorously unsuccessful in love. Amans makes no pretense of having devoted himself to books instead of the direct search for experience and he has had his share of the minor pleasures of love. But his conspicuous lack of success in this affair is expressed in a recurrent pattern of response to Genius that reminds us of Chaucer's repeated protestations of ignorance. When asked if he is guilty of lack of punctuality Amans replies no. He has not been successful enough to get appointments. The effect is subtle, for while we smile we are also moved. The two reactions are not incompatible. Dante, the pilgrim, is not without his humorous aspects, yet is, nonetheless, ultimately serious. Perhaps there is something of the historical Gower in Amans. How much we can never know. Perhaps Gower is dramatizing one of his private self-images. This, too, we shall never know.

We do know that a complete identity between Amans and the Gower of history is untenable.

The nature of the persona becomes clearer if approached in terms of function. Chaucer attains a variety of effects from his narrator, but all contribute to his basic strategy of indirection. The range stretches through the superb comic dialogue between Chaucer and the Eagle in the House of Fame, the supreme tact of the Book of the Duchess, and, of course, the complexity of the narrator's function in the Troilus. Chaucer consistently attempts to maintain a degree of aesthetic distance, of detachment. His persona does not function to evade experience, neither does it function to stand as the possible experience of the real Chaucer. It acts in fact to discourage any such interpretation. Its effect, as in the Troilus, is to expand our moral sense, make us aware of the complexity of judgment, enrich the implications of the tale. It makes it impossible for us to identify completely with Troilus. Yet Chaucer can bring us close enough to engage our sympathy and then adjust the focus so that we can perceive the outcome in a larger perspective.

Amans functions in contrasting ways. He is narrating his own experience and the effectiveness of the narration comes from the skill with which Gower has made the confession sound like the record of the

possible experiences of a real person. Obviously, we would not expect to find in a first person narrative the complex manipulation of viewpoint displayed in the Troilus. But the choice by Gower of the first person narrator is highly significant. The importance becomes clear when we consider its relationship to Gower's earlier works. In neither the Mirour nor the Vox has Gower attempted to create a persona equivalent to Amans. Macaulay tries to deduce some biographical traits from the Mirour but this is a doubtful procedure.[58] Both the Mirour and Vox are written in the first person but do not claim to be the record of personal experience. In the Mirour, Gower asserts several times that he is not speaking from firsthand experience but reporting common knowledge. The Vox is concerned with the immediate and ugly reality of the Peasants' Revolt. But in the poem Gower adopts the role of universal spokesman and gives no indication of the effects of the uprising on the personal fortunes of the historical Gower.

While neither the Mirour nor Vox has a persona as such, they do have a voice. Fisher sees this voice as typical of the complaint genre to which he assigns both. "The universal voice, the voice of the Old Testament prophets, is the mode of perception and expression that

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[58] Works, I, p. lxiv.

distinguishes medieval complaint from classical satire..."[59]

According to Fisher, this voice is most emphatic in the Vox:

> ... in the Vox more than in any of his other pieces, Gower adopts the apocalyptic tone of the inspired preacher. Furthermore, instead of being structured like the Mirour about a sequence of sins, virtues, and classes, the Vox shows some evidence of being structured about the increpatio (scolding), exhortatio (exhortation), and comminatio (warning) which St. Bonaventure set forth as a pattern for the penitential sermon.[60]

I have no quarrel with this description of the Vox and Mirour. However, Fisher goes on to make his usual application: "The generalized voice of complaint and the individualized voice of satire will help account for Gower's and Chaucer's different treatment of similar materials."[61] Many students of Chaucer will question the adequacy of the term satire to describe the complex way of viewing the world apparent in the Canterbury Tales. But even if for the sake of argument we temporarily abandon this point there is an equally misleading movement in Fisher's comparison. He uses it to reinforce the impression of Chaucer the artist and Gower the inept didacticist. Actually what can be learned about Gower, or about Chaucer for that matter, from this type of comparison is questionable. A much more significant comparison is between the voice, and its implications in the Mirour and the Vox,

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[59]Fisher, p. 105.

[60]Ibid., p. 145.

[61]Ibid., p. 105.

and the *persona* of the *Confessio*.

The message of the voice of the *Mirour* and *Vox* is to beware and to repent. The exhortations cover the full range of human behavior but are shrillest in their treatment of sexual temptation.

> A blush used to deck a woman's cheeks: shamelessly, she is now more mad with passion than a sinful man. She is silent as a jackdaw, acts as chaste as a pigeon, and is as gentle toward you as a rose -- bearing thorns. As I put up liquid in a sieve, so do I put up counsel in a woman -- but from this you can understand that I am in love. As long as the unctuous Jezebel reigns with her blandishing words, he who was once Joshua is turned into Ahab. As long as the head inclines to vices, the members subject to it succumb to the same evils, whether by force or inclination. Thus lust stands decked in flowers and ornamented with vices, and the flower of virtue is trod under foot by men.[62]

Both the *Mirour* and *Vox* exhort men to avoid vice. The assumption of such an exhortation is evidently the sovereignty of the will. Vice can be avoided. The admonition also implies something about the preacher. He has sinned in the past and repented. But he is clearly in a different position now. All men are sinners

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[62] Quam solet inque genis ornare rubor muliebris,
Absque pudore malo plus furit ipsa viro.
Graculus ipsa quasi tacet, et quasi casta columba
Se gerit, et paciens est tibi spina rosans:
Vt laticem cribro, sic in muliere recondo
Consilium, set eo scire potes quod amo.
Dum Iesabel regnat blando sermone pervngens,
Qui fuerat Iosue, vertitur hic in Achab.
Dum caput inclinat viciis, sibi subdita membra
Succumbunt ipsis vi vel amore malis:
Comptaque sic viciis stat florigerata voluptas,
Est quoque virtutis flos pede trita viris.
(VI, 1355)

including preachers. But his authority comes from the fact that there are at least temporary distinctions among sinners and the preacher, while preaching is not helpless in the grip of an irresistible vice.

In the Mirour and Vox the narrator presents lore. In the Confessio lore is largely restricted to Genius. In contrast to the earlier works his theme is the irresistibility of lore, an at least partial denial of the efficacy of the will. Amans' pose of humility and helplessness, while humorous and traditional, is also consistent with the new motif of the power of love.

Those who insist on the continuity of the Confessio with its predecessors point for confirmation to the linkage in the Latin titles Speculum Meditantis, Vox Clamantis and Confessio Amantis. The Mirour and Vox have a great deal in common and both are designed with a hortatory purpose. But even between these two the titles reflect the individual differences as much as the similarity. The meditative tone of the Mirour is much milder than the Vox as befits a work originally conceived as a private devotional manual in the penitential tradition. The shriller, denunciatory tone of the Vox is appropriate to a work in the prophetic mode whose model is the sermon. The speaker's attitude toward the world is similar in both works: Moral condemnation varying in intensity but expressed by someone in a position of

relative detachment.

Gower's didactic works have formed the basis for the impression of the historical Gower as a stern moralist. However, great caution must be used in deducing any of Gower's personal traits from his works. The presence of a voice rather than a persona strengthens the temptation. Nevertheless, even among the didactic works the voice varies with the genre. In the absence of any independent evidence we must assume that the voice is determined by the genre. Effective preaching is always a skill, sometimes an art. Surely the "Pardoner's Tale" is an adequate warning against deducing the character of the preacher from the contents and skill of the sermon.

All of the evidence indicates that Gower was a skilled and conscious literary craftsman. He knew what his titles meant and there is no justification for ignoring their literal meaning. The titles are consistent with the work they label and accurate clues to their content. This is true of the Confessio except that the difference, indicated by its title, between it and its predecessors is much greater than between the Mirour and the Vox. It implies, in fact, a one hundred and eighty degree turn. The point of view of the Mirour and the Vox is that of the judge. The point of view of the Confessio is that of the accused. But the term "point of view" is misleading. It implies an objective reality

observed from different aspects. Actually, the shift from the external observer of the Mirour and Vox is more radical than that. Reality is perceived as different. Different laws actually at work. A shift of this kind implies a change in content. Even if, as Fisher believes, the subject matter is the same, it would be difficult not to say something different about it, having so altered a seminal premise.

The characteristic tone of the complaint genre is indignation. The tone of the Confessio is pity and compassion for the sinner. To Amans, helpless in the grip of passion, tortured by unsatisfied yearning, admonitio of the type prevalent in the moral treatises would be both cruel and irrelevant. It would be like telling a starving man to eat more. Amans knows that his will has been crippled. He therefore knows that the meaning of life is not settled by an assertion of will, that the strongest and most virtuous can fall, that the pressures on the spirit are more unpredictable, more violent, more complex than they appear from the pulpit. What the Confessio has that its predecessors do not have is a pervasive awareness of these forces, a concrete sense of what it is to be enmeshed in them.

If from the point of view of the Confessio the problem is different, so are the solutions. The exercise of the will is not irrelevant, for the cooperation of

the patient is essential. But it cannot come about by his unaided efforts. The medical terms that pervade the Confessio are indicative, for healing is an often painful process, in which the soul is brought to face itself and its world. It does not come about by the assertion of the will because the goal is to manipulate the dislocated will back into its socket so that it can function once again.

This analysis confirms my conviction of the unique place of the Confessio in Gower's work. The depiction of Amans is in fact the pivot on which the swing from didacticism has been executed. With this established, there remains another problem concerning Amans that must be dealt with: his place within the structure of the Confessio. As an issue this has not been subject to much discussion by students of Gower. Nevertheless, the failure to attempt to define it with precision has seriously distorted many attempts to deal with the poem. The problem is to define the relationship of lover, lore, and tales. Difficulty in estimating the proportions of the three has been intensified by the habit of anthologizing the Confessio. The length and variety of the tales encourage this tendency. It has been suggested that Gower would not have been disturbed by this practice. Perhaps. But obviously what suffers most in anthologization is the frame, including the portrait of the lover.

The frame has suffered most from Gower's reputation as a moralizer. Apparently few students have thought a careful study of Genius' pronouncements worthy of endeavor, and of these few apparently none have thought them worthy of consideration as poetry. If the frame as a whole is derogated, the place of Amans must also be underestimated. He is admired, but more as a charming tour de force than as an integral part of a structure. What remains are the tales. These have been widely regarded as the principal matter of the Confessio.

In attempting to estimate what really is the center of the Confessio, a subjective element must enter in. I am convinced that the lover's confession is the heart of the poem. This is supported by the title, which must be ignored by those who think the tales are the real achievement of the book. But it seems to me that we ignore Gower's signs at great risk. The Canterbury Tales has probably reinforced the tendency to regard the Confessio as primarily a collection of tales. However, the Canterbury Tales are labelled as such. I think that anyone who reads the Confessio through carefully will find that the most vivid impression left on his memory is the lover's story, particularly its conclusion. There are a number of reasons for this. By the time the reader reaches the conclusion he has dealt with one hundred fifty stories. Keeping track of them is a

formidable task. A few will have made a vivid impression but his command of the details of most is apt to be vague. He has, of course, had the lover before him throughout the poem. The lover's story is the longest, most complete and most detailed portrait in the poem. The reader is on more intimate terms with him than with any other personage.

These "subjective" reasons are, however, based on solid structural grounds. Fisher has surmised that prologue and conclusion were composed as a unit.[63] We have little solid evidence but it is a not unreasonable conjecture from the evident care taken to fit them together. If this is so, it is likely that the portrait of the lover as a whole was conceived as a unit. Gower then filled in each of the sins with a sufficient number of tales. It would be possible to abstract the portrait of the lover from the frame. We would have a mutilated and dimmer, but still effective, unit. On the other hand, the frame could not stand alone. This is appropriate since its primary technical function is to hold the tales and the lover's individual story together.

What then is the relation of the tales to the lover's story? Formally, they are exempla for the points made by Genius. Some critics have remarked that the tales

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[63]Fisher, p. 105.

are not always suited to the sin they are supposed to exemplify. This might be true. However, I suspect that if Gower had succeeded the result would have been mechanical and rigid. The Canterbury Tales are not perfectly wedded to their frame either. To demand that the one hundred fifty tales be perfectly integrated is asking too much. Moreover, it is not really required by the function of the story. However, on a broader thematic level it should be evident that the vision of life presented in the tales harmonizes with that presented in the lover's narrative.

If we are to understand the place of the tales in the total economy of the poem we must not be misled by the poem's non-literary model. Gower has adapted the confessional manual as an organizing device. He has not been bound by it, and his use of it is not identical to the purposes of the practical work. To understand what is involved and why Gower's freedom in relating the stories does not detract from the total effectiveness we must turn to another concept. Professor Wimsatt has proposed the idea that the notions of Mirror, Encyclopedia, and Allegory can bring us close to the heart of Middle English literature.[64] The three are, of course, not separate. All are found united in the Confessio. A characteristic of the encyclopedia was

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[64]James I. Wimsatt, Allegory and Mirror (New York, 1970).

completeness, of the mirror accuracy in reflecting reality. Both could be combined in the ideal of an encyclopedic mirror. The ideal had a strong attraction for Gower who in both the Mirour and Vox experimented with various schemes and combinations of schemes in an effort to be as extensive and as systematic as possible.

This is, in a way, an obvious point, but it is of extreme importance for an understanding of the structure of the Confessio. Amans' experience is that of a particular individual trying to come to terms with both himself and the world. The tales portray this experience as part of a recurrent pattern on a universal scale. Genius is the appropriate mediator. He embodies that stock of ideas with which an individual attempts to interpret his world. Learning to understand love means learning to understand one's relation both to an individual and to a universal force. One way of coming to terms is by learning to see one's own experience in a universal context. Providing this context is a function of art, indeed one definition of it. But even art cannot be understood without an interpretive apparatus. Genius thus mediates between the individual and immediate experience as well as the individual and the realm of the aesthetic. As a matter of fact, he relates all three.

If this is true it is obvious that what we are involved in is a more complex structure than that of the

practical confessional manual or the sermon. In both the exemplum, to fulfill its function, must be clearly integrated with the generality it is meant to illustrate. The exemplum makes an abstraction concrete. This is partly its function in the Confessio, but only partly. It functions also to move Amans' consciousness to another plane beyond his own individual experience. In a real sense the experience conveyed in the tales is part of the lover's experience.

I think that this represents what is actually going on in the Confessio and is not an imposed construct. The anxiety to find organic unity in medieval literature is a vice and temptation of modern criticism. However, in attempting to understand the Confessio our best guide as usual is Gower, who in a fine speech by Amans largely confirms this interpretation of the relation of Amans' own story to the tales.

> An ek in other wise also
> Fulofte time it falleth so,
> Min Ere with a good pitance
> Is fedd of redinge of romance
> Of Ydoine and of Amadas,
> That whilom weren in mi case,
> And eke of othre many a score,
> That loveden longe er I was bore.
> For whan I of here loves rede,
> Min Ere with the tale I fede;
> And with the lust of here histoire
> Sometime I drawe into memoire
> Hou sorwe mai noght evere laste;
> And so comth hope in ate laste,
> Whan I non other fode knowe.
> Riht as it were a cherie feste;
> Bot forto compten ate leste,

> As for the while yit it eseth
> And somdel of myn herte appeseth:
> For what thing to myn Ere spreedeth,
> Which is plesant, somdel it feedeth
> With wordes suche as he mai gete
> Mi lust, in stede of other mete.
> (VI, 875)

Note that it is the "lust" not "moralitas" of the tales that he draws into memory. They provide encouragement, pleasure, comfort, compensation. This is the language of aesthetics not ethics, describing a theory of art that is certainly not unattractive or trivial -- and describing it without mention of the "dulce et utile." It is also an accurate description of the intent and effect of the Confessio.

CHAPTER IV

THE MEANING OF THE CONFESSIO

Most interpretations of Gower's understanding of love emphasize its orthodoxy and consistency with established treatment. According to Fisher, the underlying theme is identical with that of the Mirour and Vox, "the degradation and transience of temporal love, which turns reason into bestiality."[65] This theme is stated in the opening lines of the Mirour:

> Car s'un soul homme avoir porroit
> Quanq'en son coer souhaideroit
> Du siecle, pour soy deliter,
> Trestout comme songe passeroit
> En nient, et quant l'en meinz quidoit,
> Par grant dolour doit terminer:
> Et puisque l'amour seculer
> En nient au fin doit retorner,
> Pour ce, si bon vous sembleroit,
> Un poy du nient je vuill conter.
> (MO, 25)

The Confessio records Amans' movement from a state of despair, irrationality, and sin, to one of rationality and a rejection of earthly love.

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[65] Fisher, p. 135.

There is certainly much in the poem to support this thesis which has gained the acceptance of scholars with such diverse sensibilities and views of Gower as Fisher and C. S. Lewis. Amans exhibits all the classic symptoms of suffering from the lover's malady, a disease which would have been regarded with pity or derision but not approval. The Confessor repeatedly advocates the claims of reason over passion. At the beginning, Amans is suffering from alienation, from nature, heaven, and from himself. At the conclusion he has moved to a state of rest. Instead of complaint he is now devoted to prayer. He has been released from the grip of his irrational passion. As C. S. Lewis says,

> ... the very nature of courtly love demanded that the perfect love poem should end with a recantation. The claims of the objective moral law -- of Resoun as the Middle Ages said -- must, in the end, be faced. Hence the last Book of Andreas, and the conclusion of Troilus and Cryseide. Gower, as well as another, is faced with this necessity. For him, as for Chaucer, the love which he celebrates is a sin, and in the lover's Will has usurped dominion over Resoun. Gower is not enough of a philosopher to achieve, like Dante, or even attempt, like Alanus, any reconciliation between the claims of his two worlds.[66]

This interpretation has a certain schematic plausibility, yet there is some doubt as to the justice it does

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[66]Lewis, p. 218.

to the actual experience of the poem. It does less than justice to Amans' experience as a lover, and the amplification of the meaning of this experience in the tales and the Confessor's doctrine. It ignores the full implications of the lover's age. Gower is not a daring speculative philosopher. Nevertheless, it appears that he has moved cautiously but surely to a resolution of his own. The poignancy comes from Gower's refusal to turn against nature even though he must turn from it. Gower takes the rare attitude of attempting to face squarely the paradox of love. He attempts to assert the legitimate claims of passion while accepting the painful limitations set by reason and morality. This conflict puts man under an almost intolerable tension. It can be borne. At least partial reconciliation is possible. But no man can avoid enduring the strain. The experience reflected in the poem is much more complex than conventional interpretations have allowed. It transcends that ordinarily expressed by a courtly poet. Gower has something new and important to say about love.

The Confessio opens with a discussion of the division of the world, a theme reasserted throughout the poem.

> But now men **tellen** natheles
> That love is fro the world departed
> So stant the pes unevene parted
> With him that liven now adaies.
> (Prologue, 168)

And later:

> Whan that the world divided is,
> It most algate fare amis,
> (Prologue, 645)

Division is the cause of all evil and, although rampant in society, finds its primal locus in the individual.

> Division aboven alle
> Is thing which makth the world to falle,
> And evere hath do sith it began.
> It may ferst proeve upon a man;
> The which, for his complexioun
> Is mad upon divisioun
> Of cold, of hot, of moist, of drye,
> He mot be verray kynde dye:
> For the contraire of his astat
> Stant evermore in such debat,
> Til that o part be overcome,
> Ther may no final pes be nome.
> Bot other wise, if a man were
> Mad al togedre of o matiere
> Withouten interrupcioun
> Ther schoulde no corrupcioun
> Engendre upon that unite:
> Bot for ther is diversite
> Withinne himself, he may noghte laste,
> That he ne deieth ate laste.
> Bot in a man yit over this
> Full gret divisioun ther is,
> Thurgh which that he is evere in strif,
> Whil that him lasteth eny lif:
> The bodi and the Soule also
> Among hem ben divided so
> That what thing that the body hateth
> The soule loveth and debateth.
> (Prologue, 971)

Having established the universal context Gower can proceed with his tales of which Amans' is only the most prominent exemplum. He is suffering intensely from "thilke unsely jolif wo" when he walks out into the fields on a May day.

Whan every brid hath chose his make
And thenkth his merthes forto make
Of love that he hath achieved;
Bot so was I nothing relieved,
For I was further fro my love
Than Erthe is fro the hevene above,
(I, 101)

The chain of cause and effect is clear. Separated from his love he feels with even greater intensity his alienation from nature. It is his separation from the forces of life -- not from God -- that troubles this lover's conscience. But, of course, the distinction is probably not valid. For Gower, and in this he is perfectly orthodox, the erotic force that flows through and animates the natural world is a manifestation of God's love and creative power. Nowhere in the Confessio is there the slightest suggestion that this force is evil or the cause of evil. As I demonstrated in my examination of the tales from Ovid a conviction of its ultimate benignity animates the poem.

The division in man is due to the fact that he is not completely definable as a creature in nature. It is a division that perplexes Amans until the end.

Ferst to Nature if that I me compleigne.
Ther finde I hou that every creature
Som time ayer hath love in his demeine,
So that the litel wrenne in his mesure
Hath yit of kinde under his cure;
And I bot on desire, of which I misse:
And thus, bot I, hath every kind his blisse.

The resoun of my wit it overpasseth,
Of that Nature techeth me the weie

> To love, an yit no certain sche compasseth
> Hou I schal spede, and thus between the tweie
> I stonde, and not if I schal live or deie.
> For thogh reson ayein my will debate,
> I mai noght fle, that I ne love algate.
> (VIII, 2224)

Gower's conception of the relation of nature, love, and reason is perfectly orthodox. Nature preserves herself through love. In purely natural creatures there is no conflict.

> So that the litel wrenne in his mesure
> Hath yit of kinde a love under his cure;

But man is in a more painful position. He has roots in nature and is subject to the same universal urge. Yet for him satisfaction is not built into the scheme of desire but is complicated by the qualities that are the signs of his transcendence of nature: reason, social ties, and the fact that his ultimate fate is located beyond nature. The more intensely he feels the force of desire the greater his consciousness of the gap between him and the rest of nature.

But the force itself is not evil and neither is human receptivity to it. Amans is ready to acknowledge all his faults but he cannot bring himself to slander his passion for he knows that it is both pure and the source of everything that is fine in him. He knows that to root out his love is to become nothing but a hollow shell. He expresses his awareness in language that also

expresses the relationship of his love to the animating force of the world. The Confessor mentions Ovid who taught, "if love be to hot/ In what manere it scholde akiele." He then urges Amans to follow Ovid's advice if "That love wringe thee to sore." Amans' rejection is unhesitating.

> My fader, if thei mihte spede
> Mi love, I wolde his bokes rede;
> And if thei techen to restreigne
> Mi love, it were an ydel peine
> To learn a thing which mai noght be.
> For lich unto the greene tree,
> If that men toke his rote aweie,
> Riht so myn herte scholde deie,
> If that mi love be withdrawe.
> (IV, 2670)

Ovid's advice was aimed at curing a crude addiction to sensual pleasure and the cure was as degrading as the addiction. Amans' love has the same ultimate source as Ovid's except that it has taken possession of his heart as well as his loins. Amans wants not simply release from discomfort. He wants fulfillment. He wants life.

This is not a partial and questionable view of reality dictated by Amans' irrational passion. There is no doubt that it represents the view of the poem as a whole. After all it is the Confessor who has stated most eloquently the doctrine of love's ennobling power.

> That love honeste in sondri weie
> Profiteth, for it doeth aweie
> The vice, and as the bokes sein,
> It makth curteis of the vilein.
> (IV, 2297)

It is this power that has made Amans so receptive to the moral rigor of Genius' teaching. In the same speech Genius goes on to confirm Amans' apprehensions about destroying his heart by destroying his love.

> And overthis, mi Sone, also
> After the vertu moral eke
> To speke of love if I schal seke,
> Among the holi bokes wise
> I find write in such a wise,
> 'Who loveth noght is hier as ded'
> For love above alle othre is hed,
> Which hath the virtus forto lede,
> Of all that unto mannes dede
> Belongeth:
>
> (IV, 2320)

Macaulay in a note calls our attention to I John iii.14: "We know that we have passed *from* death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death." Other verses might have served as well but this is sufficient to remind us of the way Gower's maintenance of the usual ambiguities in the term "love" has enabled him to effect a subtle reconciliation of courtoisie and Christian charity.[67] This is not an accidental and isolated moment but is confirmed by our analysis in Chapter III of the ideal of love implied by Genius' teaching and the nature of Gower's use of courtly and ecclesiastical terminology.

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[67] J. A. W. Bennett, "Gower's Honeste Love" in Patterns of Love and Courtesy. Ed. by J. Lawlor (Evanston, 1966). This interpretation has much in common with mine.

The reality of reconciliation is confirmed by the fact that despite the high ethical quality of this love it is neither ethereal nor platonic. Its purpose is to bear fruit in this world. In his comment on the tale of Rosiphilee Genius condemns adulterous love, praises marriage, and repeats Jean de Meun's argument that to practice celibacy is to vote for the suicide of the species.

> Mi ladi Venus, whom I serve,
> What womman wole hire thonk deserve,
> Sche mai noght thilke love eschuie
> Of paramours, bot sche mot suie
> Cupides lawe; and natheles
> Men sen such love sielde in pes,
> That it nys evere upon aspie
> Of janglinge and of fals Envie,
> Fulofte medlid with disese:
> Bot thilke love is wel at ese,
> Which set is upon mariage;
> For that dar schewen the visage
> In alle places openly.
> A great mervaile it is forthi
> How that a Maiden wolde lette,
> That sche hir time ne besete
> To haste unto that ilke feste,
> Whereof the love is al honeste.
> Men mai recovere lost of good,
> Bot so wys man yit nevere stod,
> Which mai recovere time lore:
> So mai a Maiden wel therfore
> Ensample take, of that sche strangeth
> Hir love, and longe er that sche changeth
> Hir herte upon hir lustes greene
> To mariage, as it is seene.
> For thus a yer or tuo or thre
> Sche lest, er that sche wedded be,
> Whyl sche the charge myhte bere
> Of children, whiche the world forbere
> Ne mai, bot if it scholde faile.
> (IV, 1467)

This view is confirmed by the majority of the tales but is most explicitly developed in the stories of Rosiphelee and Jephthah's daughter. The tale of Rosiphelee is ostensibly about idleness, but its real import is the sterility attendant upon a rejection of love. That sterility is a serious matter is the theme of the tale of Jephthah's daughter, more than half of whose lines are devoted to mourning for her unfulfilled maidenhood.

> That sche the whyle mai bewepe
> Hir maidenhod, which sche to kepe
> So longe hath had and noght beset;
> Wherof her lusti youthe is let,
> That sche no children hath forthdrawe
> In Mariage after the lawe,
> So that the poeple is noght encressed.
> (IV, 1565)

II

The conclusion to the poem has been almost universally admired, and with justice, for nowhere else is Gower's sureness of touch, his awareness of the cruelty of the lover's dilemma, more immediately evident. Amans prays for relief from his misery. Venus promises him relief but warns him that it will not be the kind he hopes for.

> For be thou hol, it schale suffice:
> Mi medicine is noght to sieke
> For thee and for suche olde sieke.
> Noght al per chance as ye it wolden,
> Bot so as ye be reson scholden,
> Acordant unto loves kinde.
> For in the plit which I thee finde,
> So as mi court it hath awarded,
> Thou schalt be duely rewarded;
> And if thou woldest more crave,
> It is no riht that thou it have.
> (VIII, 2366)

After this warning, Venus begins to lead him step by step through his painful cure. The first stage is to remind him of the stringent requirements of love and then to force him to confront the fact of his incapacity.

> For whan sche hath me wel beholde,
> Halvynge of scorn, sche seide thus:
> "Thou wost wel that I am Venus,
> Which al only my lustes seche,
> And wel I wot, thogh thou beseche
> Mi love, lustes ben ther none,
> Whiche I mai take in thi persone;
> For loves lust and lockes hore
> In chambre acorden neveremore,
> And thogh thou feigne a yong corage,
> It scheweth wel be the visage
> That olde grisel is no fole:
> There ben fulmanye yeres stole
> With thee and with suche othre mo,
> That outward feignen youthe so
> And ben withinne of pore assay.
> Min herte wolde and I ne may
> Is noght beloved nou adayes;
> Er thou make eny such assaies
> To love, and faile upon the fet,
> Betre is to make a beau retret;
> For thogh thou myhtest love atteigne,
> Yit were it bot an ydel peine,
> Whan that thou art noght sufficant
> To holde love his covenant.
> (VIII, 2396)

The images, both those taken from warfare and the homelier ones that follow, are precise, appropriate, devoid of any trace of sentimentality. Gower's response is, appropriately enough, shock.

> And as a man the blase of fyr,
> With water quencheth, so ferd I;
> A cold me cawhte sodeinly,
> For sorwe that myn herte made
> Mi dedly face pale and fade
> Becam, and swoune I fell to grounde.
> (VIII, 2444)

A procession of lovers, young and old, serves to illustrate once more the general law. Finally, Venus brings him a mirror and forces him to look at himself.

> And forth withal sche tok me tho
> A wonder Mirour forto holde,
> In which sche bad me to beholde
> And taken hiede of that I syhe;
> Wherinne anon myn hertes yhe
> I caste, and sih my colour fade,
> Myn yhen dymme and al unglade,
> Mi chiekes thinne, and al my face
> With Elde I myhte se deface
> So riveled and so wo besein,
> That ther was nothing full ne plein,
> I syh also myn heres hore.
> Mi will was tho to se nomore
> Outwith, for ther was no plesance;
> And thanne into my remembrance
> I drowh myn olde daies passed,
> And as reson it hath compassed,
> (VIII, 2820)

The undeniable excellence of this closing has had the unfortunate result of effectively usurping critical effort that should have been more evenly distributed over the lover's whole tale. Consequently, avoidable distortions have affected critical judgments. Amans is in a state of alienation or sin. He does need assistance. But his passion in itself is not sinful. It certainly has not had any of the more distateful consequences of sinful passion. He has not corrupted innocence, betrayed his liege lord, or neglected his public duties. On the contrary, his love has made him a better person. It is both pure and precious. He sinned not against the moral law but against the rule of nature. This is also to be

guilty of irrationality since the laws of nature are regulated by divine reason. Nevertheless, he has not been forbidden love's court because of moral turpitude, but because he can no longer meet certain stringent eligibility requirements. His candidacy for a high and honorable place has been rejected. His sin was not in loving but in refusing to accept the fact, necessity, and implications of aging built into Nature's system of planned obsolescence.

Amans' age is not simply an imaginative touch. If he had been younger we would have had a different story and probably a different interpretation. The May-January theme is a literary universal. But from the classic period through the Renaissance it was a staple of comedy in which the aged lover was invariably treated with contempt, an attitude justified by the conviction that such a passion was unnatural. The affront was to eros not to morality, and a violation of conventional morality could even be countenanced if the ridiculous oldster were to be discomfited. That Gower should treat this theme seriously and sympathetically from the point of view of the old lover is evidence both of his artistic boldness and the need to beware of conventional interpretations.

C. S. Lewis felt that the ending approached high tragedy. Almost everyone argues that it is sad, but there

is little reflection on why. The age of the lover is involved. But more precisely, it is sad because what was lost, the natural world, is of real, if relative, value. It is sad because the lover's intuition that the loss of his love would be the loss of his heart is true, and because the record of his affair has convinced us that something precious has been lost. Aman's passion held him because he held on to an illusion about himself, not about the value of his love.

It is not age that cures him. It is the awareness of age, its acceptance. Acceptance brings peace. But the price is high. Peace comes only at the cost of a separation from the life forces. Venus warns him:

> Forthi tak hiede of that I seie;
> For in the lawe of my comune
> We be noght schape to comune,
> Thiself and I, nevere after this.
> Now have y seid al that ther is
> Of love as for thi final ende:
> Adieu, for y mot fro the wende.
> (VIII, 2934)

Within the Christian tradition is an attitude that could look forward to age and death as a blessing because it brought with it release from the turmoil of the passions. But if we have followed the record of this love with attention, it is clear that a more complex resolution is involved. Amans' love was his bane but it was also the very center of his life. It was what his life was about.

It is important to stress again that there is nothing joyful about this coming to terms with death. Chaucer's Troilus dies disillusioned but still young and in the prime of his powers. He can laugh because he can see the world and the obsessions that controlled him in the perspective of eternity. There is joy in his release. Amans, on the other hand, has not been carried joyful and triumphant to some place above the battle. Amans has suffered a real loss. He has not seen a vision which can compensate for this loss. He has simply been freed from an obsession. Revelation has been an instrument in his cure, but the revelation is his own face, not God's. It is not part of his consolation or reward.

> And whanne y sigh non othre weie
> Bot only that y was refusid,
> Unto the lif which y hadde usid
> I thoughte nevere torne ayein:
> And in this wise, soth to seyn,
> Homward a softe pas y wente,
> (VIII, 2962)

There is peace and consolation in this but there is also loneliness and resignation. He is going, according to Venus' orders

> ...ther vertu moral duelleth,
> Wher ben thi bokes, as men telleth,
> Whiche of long time thou hast write.
> (VIII, 2925)

This is obviously meant to recall the rejection of didactic literature in the opening of the poem. The lines have been interpreted as proof of the lover's having been restored

to his authentic, i.e., rational, self. But these lines occur within the context of his banishment from love's court. No longer capable of participating in nature's enterprises, he has no other place to go but the realm of pure (and sterile?) morality.

C. S. Lewis argues that if Gower had known when to stop he would have had an ending equal to that of Samson Agonistes, but by his failure in restraint blurred the tragic force of the conclusion.[68] Omission of the epilogue would undoubtedly have made the poem more palatable to modern critics. However, Gower had a legitimate reason for not attempting to take advantage of the tragic possibilities. A tragic ending would have contradicted his central vision. Man's locus in the universe is on a severe geological fault. If the contradiction were irreconcilable there would be grounds for tragic interpretation. Satisfaction is often impossible. However, reconciliation, although difficult, is not. One can come to terms with life even though few do. As the illustrative tales have shown, the casualty rate is high. A recognition of the difficulty is behind Gower's insistence on the necessity of tempering justice with pity. Clearly those breakdowns that occur at the point of tension between nature and the moral order deserve sympathy and compassion. However, moral collapse is not inevitable. Violence and treachery occur only in the illustrative tales, not in Amans' personal story.

[68] Lewis, p. 221.

For Gower, one avenue of reconciliation is marriage, an institution that allows man to participate in nature's process of renewal and continuity while observing the peculiar demands of human morality. It implies a rejection of asceticism and libertinism as well as the rarefied sublimation of the south. Gower's attitude toward marriage is considerably more positive than the Pauline, "it is better to marry than to burn." His ideal is "loiale amie avoec loiale amis (Traitie III, 3)." This notion of marriage as a union of equals was not original with Gower. On the contrary, it was a widely respected and popular ideal if not practice.[69] But Gower's contribution to the rationale of this ideal and the image of woman it implied is significant. The portrayal of Amans' lady is admittedly shadowy. But Gower still manages to convey a deep interest in, and a concrete sense of, the intricacy of a real relationship. The ideal of love implied in Genius' teaching gives genuine weight and substance to the notion of amicitia which turns out to be not a simple quality but something to be achieved by a long and arduous discipline. The lover's own story is not a record of a marriage, but in the elaboration of the ethical and psychological basis of marriage and the understanding of its intrinsic equality, Gower can be seen as the distinguished predecessor of Spenser.

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[69]Gervase Mathew, "Marriage and Amour Courtois in Late Fourteenth-Century England," in Chaucer and His Contemporaries, ed. H. Newstead (New York, 1968).

While marriage has an important place in Gower's general view, it would be inaccurate to claim that the poem is primarily concerned with marriage. Marriage is one possible means of reconciliation. But it is not a possible solution for all, as Amans' story teaches. In fact, the central irony of the poem is built on Amans' ineligibility. Genius foresees the outcome from the very beginning yet nevertheless leads the lover through the difficult discipline of the art of love. If Genius were propounding an ordinary ars amatoria, the course might very well seem not only superfluous but even cruel. However, it is a mark of the richness of Gower's conception that the discipline of love should also be applicable to the discipline of forsaking love and facing death.

This is not achieved through sleight of hand, for the integration of the ars and remedia amoris is implicit in Gower's understanding of the basic conditions of loving. To love is to live, the lover is told -- and believes. But love is an adventure, and over it hangs the uncertainty inseparable from every great enterprise. Genius delivers the warning with ominous frequency throughout the poem.

> And thus fulofte men beginne,
> That if thei wisten what it mente,
> Thei wolde change al here entente.
> (I, 57)

To love a man mai wel beginne
Bot whether he schal lese or winne,
That wot noman til ate laste:
Forthi coveite noght to faste,
Mi Sone, bot abyde thin ende,
Per cas al mai to goode wende.
(V, 4560)

These pronouncements serve as both premonitions of the ending and part of the Confessor's effort to prepare Amans gradually for his eventual disengagement. They are, however, perfectly consistent with the ideal of love implied in Genius' teaching, in particular its emphasis on the need to respect the freedom and integrity of the loved one and the corollary that to love one must be prepared to accept rejection. One cannot love without being willing to risk much.

The theme of love's fickleness had traditionally been linked to the widespread medieval preoccupation with the instability of Fortune. Gower is not an exception. The connection is made explicit throughout the Confessio and forms the usual context for Genius' warnings to Amans on the unpredictability of his affair.

For love is blind and may noght se,
Forthi may no certeinete
Be set upon his jugement,
Bot as the whiel aboute went
He yifth his graces undeserved,
And fro that man which hath him served
Fulofte he takth aweye his fees,
As he that pleieth ate Dees,
And therupon what schal befalle
He not, til that the chance falle,
Wher he schal lese or he schal winne.
(I, 46)

Fortune's operation of the wheel of love is not only fickle but irresistible.

> It hath and schal ben everemor
> That love is maister wher he wile,
> Ther can no life make other skile;
> For wher as evere him lest to sette,
> Ther is no myht which him may lette,
> (I, 34)

The theme is repeated at every level throughout the poem. It is so pervasive and so strong that it appears to contradict another tenet, man's responsibility for his own actions, held with conviction by Gower throughout his career.

> And natheles yet som men wryte
> And sein that fortune is to wyte,
> And som men holde oppinion
> That it is constellacion,
> Which causeth al that a man doth:
> God wot of both which is soth.
> ....
> For after that we falle and rise
> The world arist and falth withal,
> So that the man is overal
> His oghne cause of wel and wo.
> That we fortune clepe so
> Out of the man himself it groweth.
> (Prologue, 529)

The contradiction is only on the surface. However, Gower's position harmonizes with most sophisticated philosophical attempts to deal with the problem of freedom and determinism. To define freedom as human sovereignty over the conditions of life is patently absurd. No man can decide where and when <u>eros</u> will operate. Attempting to avoid its claims is vain and possibly suicidal. Nevertheless, the manifestations of <u>eros</u> are subject to

modification. While the force may very well prove too strong for an individual to channel, he must still attempt the struggle.

> Thou dost, my Sone, ayein the riht,
> Bot love is of so gret a miht,
> His lawe mai noman refuse,
> So miht thou thee the betre excuse
> And natheles thou schalt be lerned
> That will scholde evere be governed
> Of reson more than of kinde.
> (III, 1193)

For Gower man is firmly tied into the chain of causality. Our best philosophers have not been able to assert more.[70]

III

The Confessio is deeply concerned with division and reconciliation. It opens with Amans alienated both from nature and himself. It closes with him at peace with himself and resigned to his place in the scheme of nature. This is the most important of the reconciliations effected in the poem. It is not, however, the only one. So pervasive is the theme that it can serve to help set the poem in the context of Gower's career, for the Confessio is itself an act of reconciliation.

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[70] See below p. 209 for Gower and Boethius.

Gower began his career by singing of love and its pleasures. There is nothing in the graceful and charming Cinkante Balades to countenance adultery but the delights they celebrate are of this world. The Mirour opens with an assertion of the emptiness of worldly love: "l'amour seculer/ En nient au fin doit retorner" (32). Later, the writing of love poetry ("Fols dits d'amour" (27340)) which presumably includes productions such as the Cinkante Balades, is given as an example of vain-glorious behavior. The Vox is concerned with human love only to condemn vigorously the adulterous variety.

> Now Paris' kind of love is commonly allowed in the world, so that anyone may enjoy it at present without a war. Hymen does not preserve people's troths, but Venus manages what is to be done in their bedchambers. Gold is engaged to be married, and the woman beautiful of face prepares herself for Venus' bedchamber, ready for many men.[71]

> The French sins now clamor to take possession of our households, which have recently fallen prey to them. Now it is permissible for every man to dance attendance upon another's wife, and this is called the noble rank's "love". This is not a vice for laymen, but a mark of esteem; for a man becomes distinguished through adultery,

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[71] Nunc amor est Paridis communis in orbe quietus,
Vt sine nunc bello quisque fruatur eo.
Non Hymeneus in hiis conseruat pacta diebus,
Set Venus in thalamis reddit agenda suis:
Aurum sponsatur, vultuque decora paratur
Ad thalamum Veneris pluribus apta viris.
(VI, 1335)

> while his adulterous wife counts dishonor for the sake of gifts. The husband who plays the same game is thereby absolved.[72]

This condemnation of adultery is maintained in the Confessio in both story and moralitas. However, it is qualified by compassion and a deep awareness of the fragility of the moral equilibrium attained by the strongest of men. But more importantly the Confessio is evidence that Gower had, at least temporarily, overcome the opposition between the poetry of love and the literature of edification that shaped his career before and after.

The extent of the reconciliation is evident in a consideration of the Confessio's relation to what should be Gower's most intractable material, his interest in social and political moralizing. I have argued throughout this study that a view of the Confessio which sees Gower's political concern as its heart is untenable. The poem is not about politics, but its vision is relevant to politics. Indeed, it would have been difficult to explore the relationship of the universal creative force to the peculiar position of man without implications for political science. But to the extent that the poem is relevant to

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[72] Gallica peccata, nuper quibus hii ceciderunt,
Clamant iam nostras intitulare domos:
Nunc licet alterius sponsam quod quisque frequentet
Est status ingenui, dicitur illud amor.
Non erit hoc laicis vicium set gracia magna,
Dum sit adulterio magnificatus homo,
Dummoda sponsa stuprum perquirit adultera donis:
Soluet ob hoc sponsus, qui luet illud opus.
(VII, 157)

politics it is concerned less with immediate practical issues than with a definition of the basis of social harmony. Gower's declaration at the opening of Book I that he intends to write about that "wherupon the world mot stonde," (I, 11) is to be taken literally. The world stands upon love in its two important senses of energy and charity. As energy love animates and sustains the whole order of creation. But it can only operate through individuals. If the moral structure that enables the individual to handle this energy in a creative fashion is faulty, social disruption is inevitable.

This emphasis on the role of the individual in the scheme of the universe gives added weight to Gower's sense of the need for individual virtue in the ruler. The king is a man like other men, hence subject to the same temptations. However, the possibilities for social chaos in the absence of moral strengths are magnified by his position. The king above all others must pay especial attention to "trouthe", the virtue which most distinguishes man from other creatures and most expresses the conviction that the center of human identity is not located in the flux of his biological impulses.

> For trouthe, which to mannes nede
> Is most behoveliche overal.
> Forthi was trouthe in special
> The ferst point in observance
> Of Alisandre, as it is seid:
> For therupon the ground is leid
> Of every kinges regiment,

> As thing which most convenient
> Is forto sette a king in evene
> Bothe in this world and ek in hevene.
> (VII, 1974)

Gower would have agreed with Nietzsche's statement that a man can be defined by his ability to keep promises. However, Gower is aware that this ability is itself a gift and the possibility of unaided resistance to temptation, especially sexual temptation, is limited. Therefore, in his discussion of the need for the king to be chaste, Gower includes a reminder that grace is essential to observance of the precept.

> And natheles, bot it be grace
> Above alle othre in special,
> Is non that chaste mai ben all.
> (VII, 4241)

Since grace is by definition an unpredictable commodity, it must be supplemented by another of Gower's favorite qualities, pity. Pity is celebrated throughout the poem, but appropriately enough it is the Emperor Constantine who discovers that, "Who that woll maister be,/ He mot be servant to pite." (II, 3299) Pity is the mother of charity. Ultimately, it is charity or Christian love that restrains the life-giving but centripetal force that animates the world. Ultimately, it is charity that makes it possible for individuals to come to terms with <u>eros</u> and society, to heal the inevitable disruptions of <u>eros</u>' unrestrained manifestations.

It is this integration of the two loves that makes the conclusion so satisfying and Gower's vision so rich. It is no accident that Gower has Venus instruct Amans, in her farewell speech, to concern himself with the commonwealth.

> Bot my will is that thou besieche
> And preie hierafter for the pes.
> (VIII, 2912)

No longer required to struggle within himself to maintain the balance between eros and morality, he is free to pray that others might find the strength. Freed from his personal problems, he can turn his attention to the wider human community. In his final prayer he takes leave of that love

> Which no phisicien can hele.
> For his nature is so divers,
> That it hath evere som travers
> Or of to moche or of to lite,
> That pleinly mai noman delite,
> Bot if him faile or that or this.
> (VIII, 3155)

This is not a rejection of the earth or of sexuality. It is a rejection of sexual passion divorced from the considerations and forces that give it human meaning. The interpretation is confirmed by the closing lines.

> Bot thilke love which that is
> Withinne a mannes herte affermed,
> And stant of charite confermed,
> Such love is goodly forto have,
> Such love mai the body save,
> Such love mai the soule amende,
> The hyhe god such love ous sende
> Forthwithe the remenant of grace;
> So that above in thilke place
> Wher resteth love and alle pes,
> Oure joie mai ben endeles.
> (VIII, 3162)

Underlying this prayer is the conviction that reality extends beyond this world. But it is not an assertion of the triviality and the transitoriness of life on earth. On the contrary, heavenly love is a force that operates in this world because the world is important. Gower is asserting not the irreconcilability of divine and human love but the integration of body and soul by the force of heavenly charity.

IV

It was as a master of rhetoric that Gower was remembered by successive generations of poets during the two centuries following his death. Their repeated tributes should remind us that the most important achievement of the Confessio might very well be stylistic. Gower's technical excellence has been recognized by modern scholars and its principal characteristics described by Macaulay.

> In the ease and naturalness of his movement within the fetters of the octosyllabic couplet he far surpasses his contemporaries, including Chaucer himself....His admirable management of the verse paragraph, the metrical smoothness of his lines, attained without unnatural accent or forced order of words, and the neatness with which he expresses exactly what he has to say within the precise limits which he lays down for himself, show a finished mastery of expression which is surprising in that age of half-developed English style, and in a man who had

> trained himself rather in French and Latin than in English composition.[73]

Something of the concentration and discipline that must have gone into the perfection of this skill can be guessed from Macaulay's remarks on Gower's successful effort to reconcile the English and French elements of the language. Macaulay points out that Gower manages to combine the French syllabic with the English accentual system of metre without violating English grammar or morphology. "The system," Macaulay claims, "was too difficult and complicated to be possible except for a specially trained hand, and Gower found no successor in his enterprise."[74]

The recognition of his technical skill has probably been as much of a hindrance as a help to his modern reputation. Polish and craftsmanship in themselves have not been highly regarded by modern critics. Moreover, his style, lacking complex metaphoric structures, is very resistant to modern methods of critical analysis. He speaks clearly and directly, seemingly leaving no need for further comment. This apparent imperviousness to critical analysis has been felt even by the two critics most responsive to his poetry and most committed to making

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[73] Works, I, p. xvi.

[74] Ibid., p. xviii.

us aware of its transcendence of mere technique. C. S. Lewis speaks of poetry "so pure in its own kind that no analysis can resolve it into elements."[75] Peter Fison notes that Gower's descriptions depend on the general effect of complementary lines rather than on individual phrases, and remarks that, "There is not much fodder here for the critics, but I think a great deal of reward for the amateur of literature."[76]

Both critics have called attention to the surprising range of Gower's verse, his command of rhythm and sound. Contrasting the music of

> Temse whan it was flowende
> (Prologue, 39)

with "the leaping syllables of"

> The Ro, which renneth on the Mor
> Is thanne noght so lyht as I
> (IV, 2286)

Fison claims that Gower uses onomatopoeia to produce "effects of which the period seems scarcely capable." As another example, he cites

> The grete, gastli Serpent glyde

in which the effect of serpentine motion is produced by the contrast between the hiss of "gastli" and the final slither in "glyde".[77]

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[75] Lewis, p. 202.

[76] Fison, p. 24.

[77] Ibid., p. 25.

The alba of Cephalus is set to music that is almost stately:

> Withdrawgh the Banere of thin armes,
> And let thi lythes ben unborn,
> And in the Signe of Capricorn,
> The hous appropred to Satorne,
> I preie that thou wolt sojorne,
> Where ben the nihtes derke and longe.
> (IV, 3220)

Silvester's sermon on the Last Judgement is cast in a prophetic tone but is nonetheless poetic:

> That dai mai no consail availe,
> The pledour and the plee schal faile,
> The sentence of that ilke day
> Mai non appell sette in delay;
> Ther mai no gold the Jugge plie,
> That he ne schal the sothe trie
> And setten every man upriht,
> Als wel the plowman as the kniht:
> The lewd man, the grete clerk
> Schal stonde upon his oghne werk,
> And such as he is founde tho,
> Such schal he be for everemo.
> (II, 3415)

The recognition of Gower's stylistic virtuosity has not been accompanied by an understanding of its relationship to his narrative aims. Because this relationship is so intimate it offers the best approach to an appreciation of both style and story. Gower's narrative line is as clear and direct as his verse. He usually tells his story in normal chronological order, uses a limited number of characters, avoids subplots and descriptive digressions. If these were his only virtues, he would have been little more than a competent chronicler. Obviously, he is much more. Nevertheless, the sources of his narrative power

have been difficult to locate. Even C. S. Lewis found Gower's straightforward narrative deceptive and even more resistant to analysis than his verse.

> ... -- it remains, from the very nature of the case, a difficult matter to assess Gower's skill. In this kind of narrative, so spare, so direct, and so concentrated on the event, it is not easy to distinguish the merit of the telling from the intrinsic merit of the story. We sometimes suspect that Gower succeeds only when he has a good story to tell and fails only when he has a bad one....Stories, or stories of this kind, are not matter but already form: Gower's art is rather to liberate the beauty of this form, to find this Hercules in the marble, than to add it.[78]

Lewis' untypical confusion is a high compliment to Gower's art and his ability to invest his final product with an air of effortlessness. On the one hand, Lewis appears to be minimizing Gower's contribution to the effect of the tale. On the other hand, to clarify his point, he uses a metaphor which implies the greatest skill and vision of an artist. Surely sculpture, or "finding the Hercules in the marble," is in no way less creative than modeling, or "adding it".

However, if there is anything to the notion of a story that is "already form", it does not apply to Gower's best tales. Of the four major poets who have been tempted by the story of Lucrece, the two greatest, Chaucer and Shakespeare, have produced from it considerably less than their best work. Moreover, as I have already shown, for

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[78]Lewis, p. 209.

his version of the story of Lucrece, Gower was indebted to Ovid only for the argument. Interpretation was completely his own.

Gower freely alters plots to suit his needs and a study of these alterations does provide clues to his intention. However, a study of his ordering of events alone cannot take us beneath the surface of his art. The individual scene is Gower's basic narrative unit. The most impressive effects in his stories depend upon the skillful control of atmosphere, emotion, focus, and pace. This control is a direct product of his stylistic virtuosity. In my analysis of a scene from the story of Lucrece, I showed how Gower's interpretation was expressed by a combination of discrete rhetorical structure, courtly diction, and skillful exploitation of sound, particularly soft sibilants.[79] This conscious subordination of his stylistic craft to his narrative purposes is confirmed by two contrasting uses of oxymoron, one of his favorite rhetorical devices.[80] Philomene laments:

> 'Though I have lost mi Maidenhede,
> Schal noman se my chekes rede'
> Thus medleth sche with joie wo
> And with hir sorwe merthe also,
> So that of loves maladie
> Sche makth diverse melodie,

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[79]See above, p. 84 ff.

[80]Cf. Vox I, 1583 and 2141.

> And seith love is a wofull blisse,
> A wisdom which can noman wisse,
> A lusti fievere, a wounde softe,
> This note sche reherceth ofte
> To hem whiche understonde hir tale.
> (V, 5987)

And Canace writes to her "dedly frend":

> 'O thou my sorwe and my gladnesse
> O thou myn hele and my siknesse,
> O my wanhope and al my trust,
> O my desese and al my lust,
> O thou my wele, o thou my wo,
> O thou my frend, o thou my fo,
> O thou my love, o thou myn hate.'
> (III, 279)

In both passages the principal rhetorical device used to express a lover's grief is oxymoron. But the passages differ greatly in effect and the differences are reflected in the use of the rhetorical figure. In the Progne story, Gower attempts to distance and mitigate the actual horrors of the tale by giving to the transformation a highly poeticized and emblematic character. The shift from direct to indirect discourse helps establish distance. The use of a familiar convention is essential to the achievement of a formal, symbolic effect. Consequently, the paradoxes must be visible without loudly calling attention to themselves. To this end, Gower weaves them into a naturally flowing sentence, containing, in addition to the conjunction 'and', expressions of causality such as 'thus' and 'so that'. The result is a passage of carefully subdued emotion at some distance from the reader.

In the tale of Canace, Gower has decided to make the scene as vivid and as moving as possible. Instead of indirect discourse, we are brought close enough to overhear her laments. The rhetorical character is emphasized in a number of ways. Oxymoron is the principal device but, in contrast to the passage from "Progne", two more figures, apostrophe and repetition, are prominent. The volume of each line is increased by its syntactical isolation. It is possible that the determination to generate as much emotion as possible is too successful. For a modern reader at least, Gower here comes perilously close to bathos. Nevertheless, both passages are evidence of an unusually sophisticated ability to use the resources of rhetoric to control emotion and the reader's relationship to a scene.

In Gower's best stories each scene forms part of a carefully modulated series. The story of Lucrece, for example, flows smoothly from soldiers' camp to king's palace, to Lucrece at home, back to camp, into the rape and suicide scenes and then to the final resolution of Brutus' call to vengeance. Gower's control of atmosphere and pace harmonizes the whole sequence. Four scenes receive special attention: Collatin's surprise visit to Lucrece, the rape, the suicide, the call to vengeance. Transitional passages are handled briskly and efficiently.

For example, the visit to Arron's light-hearted wife who "spake noght of hire housebonde" is disposed of in ten lines. The surprise visit to Lucrece which immediately follows is given forty lines. This scene is carefully developed to establish the mutual tenderness and devotion characteristic of her relationship to her husband. The language of courteous love in the closing lines creates a mood that adds to the horror of the later rape and intensifies the poignancy of the final tearful reunion.

> Whan Collatin hath herd hire telle
> The menynge of hire trewe herte,
> Anon with that to hire he sterte,
> And seide, 'Lo, mi goode diere,
> Nou is he come to you hiere,
> That ye most loven as ye sein.'
> And sche with goodly chiere ayein
> Beclipte him in hire armes smale,
> And the colour, which erst was pale,
> To Beaute thanne was restored,
> So that it myhte noght be mored.
> (VII, 4836)

An essential element in Gower's harmonization of these scenes is his control of tempo. He lingers over the conversation leading up to Lucrece's suicide. The scene is dominated by anguish and despair. The deliberate spacing of the three attempts to persuade Lucrece to speak prolongs the emotion and adds to the atmosphere of helplessness.

Mood and tempo abruptly change in the last scene as Brutus leaps into action and calls upon the community to meet the crisis. The whole passage asserts order,

rationality, and purpose after a scene of great emotion and paralytic pathos. The actions are deliberate, decisive, essential. Syntax, sound and diction are carefully subordinated to the overall intention. Gower normally expresses high speed or frantic movement by closely packing a line with verbs.

> I serve, I bowe, I loke, I loute,
> Min yhe folweth hire aboute.
> (IV, 1169)

But here where the aim is to express the orderly sequence of directed action there is seldom more than one verb to a line, sometimes none.

> And Brutus with a manlich herte
> Hire housebonde hath mad up sterte
> Forth with hire fader ek also
> In alle haste, and seide hem tho
> That thei anon withoute lette
> A Beere for the body fette.
> (VII, 5093)

In contrast to the nasal, vowel and soft sibilant rhymes that dominate the preceding passage, the assertive sounds are t's and d's: kepte, lepte, oute, aboute, laste, caste, herte, sterte, haste, lette, fette, bledende, criende. The tender courtly diction so appropriate to the expression of intimate emotions in preceding scenes has been replaced by the stern, objective assertion of public morality and communal responsibility.

> So that the comun clamour tolde
> The newe schame of Sennes olde.
> And al the toun began to crie,
> 'Awey, awey the tirannie
> Of lecherie and covoitise!'
> (VII, 5115)

Gower's narrative success in both the tales and the Confessio as a whole is a stylistic achievement. This achievement is the product of a harmonization and purification of his earlier modes of composition. Behind the delicacy and refined eroticism that color the poem and are so successfully incorporated into as rigorously moral a tale as "Lucrece" is the mastery of the idiom of courtly love first attained in the Cinkante Balades. The twelve line stanza of the Mirour provided drill in the fluent use of couplet and verse paragraph. Behind the bite and weight of those vigorous moral passages, such as the reminder of the Last Judgement or "the newe schame of Sennes olde" that toughen the fibre of the poem are the efforts at sarcasm and irony in the Vox.

The major faults of both the Mirour and the Vox have been overcome. The abstract diction of the Mirour has been replaced by a concrete vocabulary, rich in specific verbs of motion.[81] A deliberate strategy of understatement and control has replaced the shrill, comminatory tone of the Vox. The addiction to amplificatio has been broken, enabling Gower to make effective use of the store of images and rhetorical figures contained in the earlier works. Evidently Gower's claim to having adopted a new style is as valid and important as his claims to a new method and new subject matter.

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[81] See discussion of Scharnebude, above, on p. 32 ff.

CHAPTER V

GOWER AND CHAUCER

Chaucer and Gower have been coupled in literary discussion for over five hundred years.[82] For the second half of this period the linkage has served to generate comparisons demonstrating Gower's moral and artistic inferiority. For the first half, however, they were jointly honored for their services to English letters and language. This linkage would have been adequately justified by their contemporaneity, their movement in the same circles, and the intrinsic worth of their individual contributions. However, there are even more solid grounds. Documents and mutual literary allusions indicate an intimate personal and literary relationship whose importance is confirmed by significant parallels of form and content in several of their works.

Chaucer granted power of attorney to Gower and Richard Forester in May, 1378 before leaving on his four-month trip to Italy. Evidence of the duration of the relationship is provided by Chaucer's dedication of the Troilus some years later.

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[82] C. F. E. Spurgeon, Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357-1900. See also, Fisher and Macaulay.

> O moral Gower, this book I directe
> To the and to the philosophical Strode,
> To vouche sauf, ther nede is, to correcte,
> Of youre benignites and zeles goode.
> (TC, 1856)[83]

Gower returns the compliment by having Venus direct a message to Chaucer at the conclusion of the Confessio.

> Adieu, for I mot from the wende.
> And grete wel Chaucer whan ye mete,
> As mi disciple and mi poete:
> For in the floures of his youthe
> In sondri wise, as he wel couthe,
> Of Ditees and of songes glade,
> The which he for mi sake made,
> The lond fulfild is overal:
> Wherof to him in special
> Above alle othre I am most holde.
> For thi now in hise daies olde
> Thow schalt him telle this message,
> That he upon his latere age,
> To sette an ende of alle his werk,
> As he which is myn owne clerk
> Do make his testament of love,
> As thou hast do thi schrifte above,
> So that mi Court it mai recorde.
> (VIII, 2940)

The omission of this greeting from later manuscripts has formed the basis for speculation on a quarrel between the two for which we have no further evidence.

Professor Bennett finds another subtle compliment to Chaucer in the eagerness of Amans' lady "To rede or here of Troilus" (IV, 2795).[84] Gower's lifelong interest in the story makes it unlikely that he would have been less than an enthusiastic reader of Chaucer's version.[85]

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[83]All citations from Chaucer are to The Complete Works, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd ed., (Boston, 1957).

[84]Selections, p. vii.

[85]Cf. Balade XX, Mirour, 5253; Vox I, 993, VI, 1325; Confessio II, 2457, IV, 2795, V, 7597, VIII, 2531.

The "Man of Law's" headlink contains a passage which is generally accepted as referring to the Confessio.

> Bot certeinly no word he writeth he
> Of thilke wikke ensample of Canacee,
> That loved hir owene brother synfully;
> (Of swiche stories I sey fy!)
> Or ellis of Tyro Appollonius,
> How that the cursed kyng Antiochus
> Birafte his doghter of hir maydenhede,
> That is so horrible a tale for to rede,
> Whan he hir threw upon the pavement.
> And therfore he, of ful avysement,
> Nolde nevere write in none of his sermons
> Of swiche unkynde abhomynacions,
> Ne I wol noon reherce, if that I may.
> (ML, 77)

The tale itself also contains what seem to be references to Gower's version of the same story (ML, 1009, 1086). In addition to these allusions, definite and possible, there are a number of stories common to the Confessio and Chaucer's Legend of Good Women and Canterbury Tales. They are: "Pyramus," "Dido," "Medea," "Lucrece," "Ariadne," "Philomena," and "Phyllis" from the Legend of Good Women and the tale of Florent, the Man of Law's tale, the Manciple's tale, and the Physician's tale from the Canterbury Tales. Further parallels between the Confessio and the Legend are so extensive and striking that they lead Fisher to conclude: "Both the historical context and special resemblances support the inference that the Confessio and the Legend were designed for concurrent presentation, their 'matiere et sens' dictated by their royal patrons."[86] The points of direct similarity are:

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[86] Fisher, p. 242.

1) appearance of the king and queen of love;

2) general details of setting and dress such as the "swote pleine," the fiery darts, the pearl crowns, the company of lovers;

3) the displeasure of the king of love with the poets;

4) the intercession of the queen of love; and

5) her assignment of a confession or penance which provides motivation for a collection of stories.[87]

Fisher is convinced that there is sufficient additional evidence to justify the conclusion that for years Chaucer and Gower read and discussed each other's work. This is debatable. Nevertheless, there is enough firm data to justify an inquiry into the nature of the relationship. Yet to date the only substantial attempt to evaluate the literary importance of this material has been made by Fisher.

Since his study has been widely hailed as the definitive study of Gower and since it is supported by massive scholarship, it will have to be considered carefully. Fisher's ambitious and comprehensive study attempts no less than to change our view of the whole configuration of influences on Chaucer. This rearrangement is partly effected by broadening the usual conception of a literary influence to include the anthropologist's notion of "stimulus diffusion." By

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[87] Ibid., p. 240.

restricting ourselves to the usual definition of influence, the impact of one imaginative work on the shape, style and content of another, we will miss a less visible but real and significant impact of another type. Fisher's belief in Gower's basic artistic ineptitude leads him to discount the possibility of Gower having taught Chaucer anything about technique. But Gower, according to Fisher, could teach Chaucer much about morality and the need to mold aesthetic works in conformity with its principles. Gower did this so effectively that his influence touched every one of Chaucer's mature works, was in fact decisive for the whole direction of his development. Gower's own works were only one channel through which this influence operated. For it was not a specific work or example as much as the total Gestalt of Gower's world view, a view dominated by a deep, severe, humorless concern with the moral dimension of human behavior that was important to Chaucer. This view could be and was expressed in conversation (some of which Fisher attempts to recreate) as well as in writing. "Gower was Chaucer's senior and mentor; their allusions to one another and the evolving pattern of the parallels in their works suggest that Gower was a sort of conscience to his brilliant but volatile friend."[88] In conversation and through the Mirour and Vox Gower articulated the major

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[88] Ibid., p. 207.

themes which were then "masterfully converted into poetry by Chaucer -- the moral basis for literature, the philosophical universality of love, the political interest in kingship, the criticism of the estates, and finally the fusion of marriage and gentilesse."[89]

Fisher offers more than a general theory. He attempts to identify the specific points at which Gower's influence operated through Chaucer's career. The first works to show the impact of Gower's world view are Troilus and Criseyde and the "Knight's Tale." According to Fisher, "In them Chaucer was exploring two different facets of the moral philosophy being developed in Gower's works, in Troilus the eventual insufficiency of temporal human love, and in the Knight's Tale the relationship between natural passion, human law, and the ruler."[90]

Gower's impact on the Canterbury Tales is even more profound. Fisher argues "that without the influence and example of the moral Gower, there might never have been a Canterbury Tales at all. Once the stimulus had been provided, Chaucer could be expected to develop his poem according to his own genius."[91] Fisher argues that the portraits

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[89] Ibid., p. 301.

[90] Ibid., p. 220.

[91] Ibid., p. 256.

in the General Prologue were individually shaped by the criticisms of the estates running through the Mirour and Vox. He makes this argument more plausible by supporting the theory that the Seven Sins provided the organizing schemata for the Prologue. As for the tales themselves, Gower's influence shaped their order, substance, and selection. This influence was particularly strong during the period in which Chaucer worked at the Custom House and lived at Aldgate, both near Gower's residence in St. Mary's Priory. However, in 1386 Chaucer gave up his post and left London. At this time, Fisher surmises, "he was at work on the stories to fill out the frame of the Legend of Good Women, and presumably he was already writing, or was on the point of beginning to write, the General Prologue. There is evidence that he left with a plan or draft of a Prologue and continuation that would have been more pleasing to his moral friend than the version of the Canterbury Tales with which he returned to the city in 1389."[92]

Out of range of Gower's stern moral influence his natural bent reasserted itself and he added the five rascals and the fabliaux. When he returned to London he showed the additions to Gower who found them offensive.

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[92] Ibid., p. 284.

In response to Gower's disapproval Chaucer revised his plan again by breaking off the Cook's tale. He did not, however, change his plan without a protest, expressed in the mocking remarks made in the headlink to the Man of Law's tale. Finally, Fisher argues that Chaucer was indebted to Gower for the development of the major theme of the marriage group, the union in marriage of gentilesse and passion. "If gentilesse mirrored in marriage thus emerges as the central topic of Chaucer's most mature artistic achievement, it becomes important to observe that these themes were first joined the way Chaucer joins them in Gower's 'Tale of Florent' and Mirour de l'omme."[93]

The first point to keep in mind in evaluating Fisher's thesis is that the application of the notion of "stimulus diffusion" to literary influence has practical difficulties not present in a normal anthropological situation where empirical evidence is usually available. For example, the transplantation of the Chinese writing system to Japan or the migration of a skill such as pottery making from a cultural center can both be verified by firm historical and archaeological evidence. This is especially important to remember since Fisher's theory has gained its authority from the immense amount of scholarship poured into his study. His footnotes provide the basis for the

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[93] Ibid., p. 295.

most complete bibliography for Gower presently available. His survey of Gower's literary reputation, investigation of the life records, catalogue of the manuscripts, description of the major works, and attempts at a definition of thematic continuity make his work indispensable. However, his research has not really turned up any hard evidence to support his image of the historical Gower and his relationship to Chaucer. His theory of influence is an elaborate construction of surmises and conjectures only feebly supported by the factual material he has so patiently assembled.

This gap is evident in the effort to prove the origin of Chaucer's themes in Gower's ideas, even if we assume that Fisher's interpretations of Chaucer are valid. The difficulty is apparent in Fisher's own evaluation of Gower as a moral philosopher. "The most impressive feature of Gower's moral philosophy that emerges from careful study of the text of his works, therefore, is not its high idealism, nor its concern over the relations between the individual and society, nor even its progressive views on social justice under the rule of law. It is rather the unity and coherence of Gower's world view and the success with which he managed to infuse into a heterogeneous mass of conventional material a personal vision capable still of commanding our respect."[94] This is praise of sorts. But it also

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[94] Ibid., p. 203.

underscores the conventionality of Gower as a moral thinker. Chaucer's interest in these ideas might have been strengthened by his association with Gower. But he would have been exposed to them elsewhere, perhaps in the same works that formed the bulk of Gower's reading. If the theme of Troilus is "the eventual insufficiency of temporal human love" we certainly do not need Gower to account for it. Nor do we need his political philosophy to account for the interest in the problems of government expressed in the Knight's tale. Chaucer's career as a public servant would have been sufficient incentive for the exploration of a common medieval preoccupation.

Fisher's whole argument is built upon and attempts to sustain the contrast between Chaucer the brilliant poet and satirist and Gower the morally sincere but artistically inept didacticist. Chaucer's poetic greatness is indisputable, but the interpretation of Chaucer as a satirist certainly is not. This is not to deny the existence of elements that lend themselves to the adjective "satirical." It is, however, to question whether the term does justice to the complex, subtle way of looking at the world manifest in Chaucer's mature works, especially if satire is defined in its classic sense as aimed at the reformation of manners. It is, of course, possible for even sensitive readers to disagree on this issue. However, to equate the

intent of the Canterbury Tales with the didactic purposes of the Mirour and Vox seems to demonstrate a primitive and indefensible notion of the nature and function of poetry.

I hope that this study of the Confessio has demonstrated that the image of Gower as artistically inept and totally obsessed with moral indoctrination is untenable. Fisher, however, as required by his concept of influence, goes beyond characterizations of Gower's works to project an image of the historical Gower. The portrait that emerges, perhaps unwittingly, from Fisher's study is of more than a public-spirited, deeply committed and concerned moralist. It is of a self-righteous, humorless, even obnoxious prig. This image is the only basis for the interpretation of the remarks at the end of the Confessio concerning Chaucer as a reprimand for having abandoned the Legend of Good Women, a work begun under royal command but which only dull, straight-faced Gower took seriously. It is the only basis for Fisher's conviction that Gower disapproved of the five rascals and tne fabliaux and was responsible for the interruption of the Cook's tale.

It seems obvious that there is absolutely no evidence for this view of the historical Gower. It is largely deduced from the alleged characteristics of his works. In Chapter III, I showed that there were no grounds for identifying Amans with the historical Gower. I also

pointed out the need to observe great caution in deducing the historical Gower from the didactic works since their tone and viewpoint were largely determined by the requirements of the genre. Moreover, even if we were justified in deducing the personality of the man from his works, Fisher's projection would be untenable. The man who could pun in Latin:

> Non amor in penis est par pene Talionis
> (Vox, V, 159)

and write the earthy English of:

> For whan a man mai redy finde
> His oghne wif, what scholde he seche
> In strange places to beseche
> To borwe an other mannes plouh,
> Whan he hath geere good ynouh
> Affaited at his oghne heste,
> (VII, 4213)

does not give any signs of being inhibited by a compulsive fastidiousness over language. It is true that Gower's presentations of physical violence and sexual activity are governed by a degree of restraint and determination to avoid sensationalism that did not operate on Chaucer. This is a matter of artistic temperament and strategy rather than evidence of prudery. Moreover, it definitely does not involve a refusal to deal frankly with either sex or violence, both of which figure prominently in the Confessio. Without even momentarily relaxing his moral sense, Gower manages to view these transgressions with compassion and understanding, not self-righteousness and indignation. Gower was probably pious. But to deduce sexual prudery

from his piety is simply to underrate grossly the capacity of human beings to live with internal tensions. Genuine piety and the ability to take pleasure in fabliaux are not mutually exclusive. Gower might have had a distaste for the texture of Chaucer's fabliaux. But he was not squeamish and there are no grounds for assuming that he would have tried to discourage Chaucer from proceeding with the Cook's tale, especially in view of his own story of "Hercules and Faunus" which, while treated with restraint, is generically a fabliau.

We can construct a more accurate view of Gower as a man of letters. He demonstrates a deep and persistent interest in questions of public morality, the health and peace of the commonwealth, and the intricacies of contemporary politics. His view of human nature is informed by a deep sense of morality balanced by sympathy and compassion. His wide reading embraces the whole body of commonly available imaginative literature as well as moral and political philosophy. His sensibility is reserved and delicate. His taste is sophisticated, urbane, tolerant, and highly cultivated.

It is difficult to avoid constructing a portrait of the personal traits of an author whose works one knows well. It is pleasant to imagine that the distinguishing traits of Gower the man of letters were manifest in his actual personality. It is tempting to imagine him as an

urbane host and sophisticated, charming conversationalist. We could imagine him as Chaucer's intimate friend, perfectly complementing Chaucer's more ebullient, extroverted personality with his quieter, perhaps slightly valetudinarian air. But this temptation is as idle as it is irresistible, for it is an unsupported creation of our imagination.

The view of the historical Chaucer implied by Fisher's theory is as unfounded as the picture of the historical Gower. At least it involves a view of Chaucer as strangely dependent on Gower's moral insight, as if without him Chaucer would have been an amoral primitive. What is the basis for the characterization of Chaucer, that solid, competent civil servant, as "brilliant but ebullient?" Can we really accept, without solid evidence, a father-son interpretation of the Gower-Chaucer relationship? Is it conceivable that Chaucer, approaching his fiftieth year with a solid record of literary and practical achievement behind him and well into his greatest masterpiece, could have been so lacking in self-confidence that he would abandon one of his most promising stories because of the raised eyebrows of John Gower? If he did accept Gower's judgment on the fabliaux, why didn't he delete them entirely? Surely the picture of the wavering Chaucer is completely incompatible with the artistic evidence that he was one of the boldest, most decisive of

medieval poets whose very failures testify to his self-confidence.

There is no single explanation for the interruption of the Cook's Tale. The Squire's Tale, Sir Thopas, The Monk's Tale, are also interrupted. Moreover, we don't know that he intended to leave it incomplete. If he did it would have been perfectly in keeping with the writing habits of a man who had previously abandoned the House of Fame, Anelida, the Legend of Good Women, the Astrolabe, and who left the Canterbury Tales incomplete. If Chaucer realized that the tale, in spite of its intrinsic worth, were inconsistent with his evolving master plan there is no doubt that he would have dropped it. Its interruption, even if temporary, is perfectly consistent with the incomplete state of the tales as a whole and the evidence that the final shape was not yet clear in Chaucer's own mind.

Efforts to estimate the weight of the allusions to the Confessio in the Man of Law's headlink are condemned to frustration by the same combination of uncertainty over Chaucer's overall intention and the absence of any firm information concerning his actual relations with Gower at the time. I would guess that the lines should not be taken seriously. They seem to indicate that Chaucer was aware, as modern critics on the whole have not been, that Gower in the Confessio was engaged in a project that diff red

radically from his earlier efforts. However, it is inconceivable that so perceptive a reader as Chaucer could have missed the moral backbone in Gower's tales and interpreted them as merely sensationalistic. It is worth pointing out that the words are assigned not to Chaucer the pilgrim but to the Man of Law and that a deliberate misrepresentation under the guise of a literal truth is a common legal stratagem. This is even more plausible when we recall that the allusion is only one of many references to literature throughout the links and could well have been part of a general strategy. Moreover, even if the allusion is to the Confessio, we are not sure that Gower was necessarily the butt of the humor. It is possible that the fabliaux had been criticized by an audience which had already accepted without objection the Confessio in spite of its subject matter. The audience, not Gower, might have been the target of the charge of inconsistency. The irony is further heightened by the fact that the Man of Law's tale had previously been treated in the Confessio.

According to Fisher, perhaps the most important effect of Gower's world view on the Canterbury Tales is evident in the marriage group. Fisher cannot make this argument without recognizing that the theme of gentilesse in marriage was treated in "The Tale of Florent" as well as in the Mirour. He does not, however, point out that this ideal informs the whole Confessio. It was also a

a common ideal in the period.[95] But if Chaucer received it from Gower it was surely through the Confessio and not the Mirour.

In spite of the weaknesses in his theory, Fisher has forced us to re-examine the relationship of Gower to Chaucer's major works. Unfortunately, Fisher expended his energy arguing for an unprovable relationship between the didactic writings and Troilus and the Canterbury Tales when what was really needed was a reconsideration of the relationship of the Confessio to the Canterbury Tales. This reconsideration is necessary for two reasons: it is essential to an evaluation of the Confessio, and our evidence indicates that the Confessio is probably the Canterbury Tales' single most important analogue. This has not been a traditional field for investigation. Understandably enough, comparisons have focused on the Legend of Good Women and the Confessio. What these discussions fail to point out is that the Confessio towers over the Legend by any defensible criteria of literary achievement. The Legend is not really an acceptable measure. The Confessio is Gower's finest work, and if we are to estimate its intrinsic value we must risk an examination of its relationship to Chaucer's masterpiece.

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[95]Mathew, see above, p. 167, n. 5.

As far as I know, the Confessio has never been taken seriously as an analogue to the Canterbury Tales. The cursory dismissal by the editors of Sources and Analogues undoubtedly represents a hitherto unchallenged scholarly consensus.

> Except in matters of external circumstances, one draws no nearer to Chaucer's conception through considering the Confessio amantis of his friend, John Gower. If, indeed the first form of the Confessio was completed by 1390, some knowledge of it might have reached Chaucer before he had formed the final plan of his own long poem. It is highly probably however, that Chaucer had designed, and partly written, the Canterbury Tales before 1390. In any case, there is virtually no specific resemblance between Chaucer's design and Gower's. In the Confessio amantis the author-lover is represented as dreaming that Venus sends him to her priest, Genius, to confess his short-comings. To the confessions and inquiries of the author, Genius replies with instruction illustrated by stories. These narratives are all recounted by Genius himself, and their purpose is to elucidate to the author the seven chief sins and all their branches and twigs. In comparison with Ovid's vivacious and pleasurable sketch, Gower's didactic and static undertaking, for all its fluency and comprehensiveness, seems even more remote from the form and temper of the Canterbury Tales.[96]

This position is almost identical with the conclusion of Professor Manly cited in a footnote:

> Whether Gower's plan became known to Chaucer and in turn set him to devising the plan of the Canterbury Tales can probably never be determined. We have no certain knowledge when Chaucer first conceived his plan or even when he first began

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[96] W. F. Bryan, G. Dempster, Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (Chicago, 1941), p. 10.

> to execute it. And we do not know that Chaucer ever read the Confessio Amantis through, though we can be fairly certain that he had heard of it and knew something about its contents...In any event, only the barest impulse to make a large collection of stories could have come to Chaucer from Gower's example, for the Confessio Amantis is structurally not the least like the Canterbury Tales.[97]

There are three essential objections to the Confessio's candidacy. The first concerns the possibility of Chaucer's having read it at all and its availability to him before he began his own work. The second focuses on the apparently vast differences between Gower's allegorical dream vision and Chaucer's solidly-grounded realistic narrative. The third objection is based on general contempt for the Confessio's artistic value.

A judgment on Chaucer's use of the Confessio depends, of course, on accurate and complete chronological information which in respect to both Chaucer and Gower is far from satisfactory. Robinson assigns the General Prologue and the earlier Canterbury Tales to the period of 1387-92.[98] The generally accepted publication date for the Confessio is 1390. It is, therefore, reasonable to assume that it was virtually completed by 1389. The accepted date for its commencement is 1386. Fisher believes that the Confessio and the Legend of Good Women were intended

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[97] Ibid.

[98] Complete Works, p. xxix.

for concurrent presentation. The coherence of the lover's tale and the care with which beginning and ending are fitted together in the Confessio indicate they were composed as a unit. This would be the reasonable way to compose a work like the Confessio: to lay out the basic frame and central story and then fill in with tales and other material as needed. The plan for the Canterbury Tales evolved and changed with the work itself. The plan for the Confessio, being much more schematic, was probably selected early and was much more likely to be followed. It is therefore reasonable to assume that by 1387-8, if not earlier, the shape of the Confessio was visible. We would like more accurate information. But what we have certainly does not preclude on chronological grounds the possibility of the Confessio's having acted upon the Canterbury Tales. If Chaucer's only access were to the published version of 1390 he still would have had it before him before composing the bulk of the Canterbury Tales. He could also have had access to the completed pre-publication version. In fact, Chaucer could have followed the whole development of the Confessio from inception to publication.

This is not only possible but likely, for in the absence of positive documentation the reservations over Chaucer's having read the Confessio are surely overly cautious. If the Man of Law's headlink does refer to the Confessio,

the mention of "Appollonius of Tyre," the last tale in the poem, supports the theory that Chaucer had read the whole poem. But we do not need this type of firm documentation. Even Professor Manly, who is skeptical of the possible influence of the Confessio upon the Canterbury Tales, has to admit that Chaucer knew something about its contents. In view of the large amount of evidence demonstrating personal acquaintance and mutual awareness of literary activity, it would be strange if Chaucer had not read the Confessio. It is inconceivable that Chaucer would have been indifferent to the work of a friend and colleague, especially one who was a major writer, had access to the same society, shared many mutual interests, and whose work in progress had a definite relationship to one of his own works and interesting parallels to another. Of all the proposed analogues to the Canterbury Tales, the Confessio is the only one to which access is definite and which Chaucer is most likely to have read. The problem is not so much proving that Chaucer had read it as finding something that would have prevented him.

Skeptics, of course, are likely to propose a formidable obstacle in the seemingly immense structural differences between the poems. They argue that Gower's conventional dream vision allegory has only superficial resemblances to Chaucer's original and realistic collection.

Generically, the Confessio can be labelled a dream vision allegory. But as always generic labels can be misleading. In fact, the Confessio is near the end of a tradition, that of the French love récit derived from the Romance of the Rose and practiced through the fourteenth century, whose general development is characterized by a movement away from allegory and vision toward realism.[99] This movement is evident in the fact that Amans neither falls asleep nor dreams although he does go out alone into a field. This is perfectly consistent with his whole tale, which remains firmly anchored to the real world. Allegory and personification do play a role in the poem, but they are never used to describe an action in the real world as they are in the Romance of the Rose. An even more important consideration is raised by recent studies which have reassessed the relationship of the Canterbury Tales to the dream vision tradition. Professor Cunningham, for example, has argued that "the literary form to which the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales belongs and of which it is a special realization is the form of the dream-vision prologue in the tradition of the Romance of the Rose and of the associated French and English poems of the subsequent century and a half."[100] There is in this argument

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[99] See below, Appendix, p. 204.

[100] James V. Cunningham, "Convention as Structure: The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales" in Tradition and Poetic Structure (Denver, 1960), p. 63. Also J. Lawrence Badendyck, "Chaucer's Portrait Technique and the Dream Vision Tradition," in The English Record, XXI, 113-125.

no intent to deny the uniqueness of the Canterbury Tales. It is only to point out that generically it is much closer to the dream vision tradition than its surface characteristics would lead one to believe.

One suspects, however, that the real obstacle to a recognition of the Confessio's possible importance is the general contempt for its aesthetic qualities. This critical judgment, no longer tenable, has obscured the important affinities whose cumulative effect is to bring the Confessio closer to Chaucer's collection than any other analogue. The affinities relate to basic intent as well as formal patterns. They are evident in the collection of tales, the realistic narrative, the degree of integration of both, an interest in "lore," attention to overall structure, an impulse toward philosophic depth.

There is little that Chaucer could have learned from Gower about narrative technique, and it is impossible to say that the idea for a collection of tales came to him from a particular source. The idea of a framed tale is a basic and universal form with which Chaucer had experimented before the Canterbury Tales. Nevertheless, the Confessio as a collection is probably the Canterbury Tales' closest analogue. Four tales are common to both; the tale of Florent, the Man of Law's tale, the Manciple's tale, and the Physician's tale. The unfixed dates of the stories in both collections make a determination of the

respective relations uncertain. Chaucer could have had access to the story of Appius and Virginia in a number of sources. Since Gower worked directly from Livy and no one has found any traces of Gower's version on Chaucer's it is evident that both worked independently.[101] Both Chaucer's and Gower's versions of the Manciple's tale derive ultimately from Ovid. However, the editors of Sources and Analogues note a number of similarities which at least suggest the possibility of a more intimate relationship.[102] Both Chaucer and Gower derived their versions of the Man of Law's Tale from the Anglo-Norman Chronicle of Nicholas Trivet. Although the relation of Chaucer's and Gower's versions to each other is a matter of dispute, most scholars grant verbal borrowings by Chaucer from Gower.[103]

These considerations are relevant only to a specific type of influence. However, it would not have been necessary for Chaucer to have worked from Gower's text in order for there to have been a significant interaction. Gower's versions could have aroused his interest and encouraged him to try his own. If there is a relationship between the two collections it is probably of

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[101] Sources and Analogues, p. 398.

[102] Sources and Analogues, p. 709.

[103] Sources and Analogues, p. 223.

this type. Such a relationship is supported by a number of stories related to the Canterbury Tales by type instead of actual plot. These similarities have been overlooked in the emphasis on the four just discussed. The saint's life is represented in the Confessio by the tale of Constantine and Silvester (II, 3187). Like Chaucer's legend of St. Cecilia it is based on the Legenda aurea. The fabliaux are represented in the Confessio by the stories of "Geta and Amphitrion" (II, 2459) and "Hercules and Faunus," a tale based on a would be seducer's blundering into the wrong bed. Gower's "False Bachelor" (II, 2500) a tale of love, knightly adventure, and the tragic consequences of broken friendship could remind us of Chaucer's "Knight's Tale." Professor Lawrence's description of the most important feature of the "Tale of Melibee" as "its repeated and earnest pleading for peace rather than war, for mediation and law rather than private revenge" could be applied with equal validity to Gower's "Athemas and Demephon" (III, 1757).[104] In both it is the young who are especially eager to conduct a war of vengeance because, according to Gower, "ther was no care for the plowh" (III, 1794). In both stories a wise old man arises in

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[104] Sources and Analogues, p. 155. Also, E. A. Block, "Originality, Controlling Purpose, and Craftsmanship in in Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale," PMLA, LXVIII (1953), pp. 572-616.

counsel to remind the audience of the evils they are proposing to unleash.

> Bot Nestor, which was old and hor,
> The salve sih tofore the sor,
> As he that was of conseil wys:
> So that anon be his avis
> Ther was a prive conseil nome.
> The lordes ben togedre come;
> This Demephon and Athemas
> Here pourpos tolden, as it was;
> Thei sieten alle stille and herde,
> Was non bot Nestor hem ansuerde.
> He bad him, if thei wolde winne
> They scholden se, er thei beginne,
> Here ende, and sette here ferste entente,
> That thei hem after ne repente:
> And axeth hem this questioun,
> To what final conclusion
> Thei wolde regne Kinges there,
> If that no people in londe were;
> ....
> He seith ek, if the pourpos holde
> To sle the poeple, as thei tuo wolde,
> Whan thei it mihte noght restore,
> Al Grece it scholde abegge sore,
> To se the wilde beste wone
> Wher whilom duelte a mannes Sone:
> And for that cause he bad hem trete,
> And stinte of the manaces grete.
> Betre is to winne be fair speche,
> He seith, than such vengance seche;
> For whanne a man is most above
> Him nedeth most to gete him love.
>
> (III, 1801)

"Up roos tho oon of thise olde wise, and with his hand made contenaunce that men sholde holden hem stille and yeven hym audience. "Lordynges" quod he, "ther is full many a man that crieth 'Werre! werre!' that woot full litel what werre amounteth. Werre at his bigynnyng hath so great an entryng and so large; that every wight may entre whan hymn liketh and lightly fynde werre; but certes, what ende that shal therof bifalle, it is nat light to knowe. For soothly, whan that werre is ones bigonne, ther is ful many a child unborn of his mooder that shal sterve yong by cause of thilke werre, or elles lyve in sorwe and dye in wrecchednesse. And therfore, er that any werre bigynne, men moste have greet conseil and greet deliberacion."

(1040)

Finally, both the Tale of Melibee and the Parson's Tale should remind us that, like Gower, Chaucer did not consider undiluted doctrine out of place in a collection of tales.

I do not intend to exaggerate the similarities. The differences are as vast as we would expect between the works of two mature artists and, for our final evaluation of each, are ultimately more important. However, the similarities are extensive enough to suggest the existence of a community of taste and common literary interests whose full dimensions are not yet visible. The fact that, in addition to others of a similar nature, four of Chaucer's twenty-four tales are also treated in the Confessio does not seem insignificant. The Confessio is distinguished by the variety of its tales and the range of sources from which they are drawn. Similarly, the Canterbury Tales is distinguished by the fact that it represents almost every known type of medieval narrative. The fact that in his treatment of these types Chaucer's artistic achievement is unmatched does not make the Confessio on the basis of the quality, scope, and variety of its tales an unworthy analogue and incapable of having suggested to Chaucer the vast possibilities for expression inherent in a collection of tales.

The Confessio also merits serious consideration as an analogue of the Canterbury Tales on the basis of Gower's

handling of the relationship of the frame narrative to the tales. The idea of a framing narrative has always been a basic component of collections of tales and among these collections are some whose frames are, on the surface, closer than the Confessio's to the Canterbury Tales.[106] However, Gower's work is distinguished by the place of the frame narrative in the whole. As I argued earlier, the heart of the Confessio is the lover's tale. If this is true it means that Gower has reversed the usual order of importance. What in the basic paradigm is a formal device for organizing the tales has become in the Confessio the matter of primary concern and the object of the poet's most intense and careful art. Amans' portrait is not only complete but it is the only complete portrayal in the poem. The incomplete state of the Canterbury Tales makes it impossible to give a final definition of the proportions between the tales and the pilgrimage. Chaucer's resources were such that if he had completed the work, tales and pilgrimage would probably have been in perfect balance. He obviously regarded the base narrative as important and worthy of as much attention as the tales themselves. In the relative importance assigned to the framing narrative, care devoted to it, and concern with the individuality and

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[106]For example, the frame of Sercambi's Novelle is a pilgrimage. See discussion in Sources and Analogues.

character development of the persons involved, the Confessio is a worthy predecessor of the Canterbury Tales.

Base narrative and tales are not meant to stand alone. The basis for integration is set in the decision to stage the interludes as a dramatic exchange between persons. Chaucer's handling of this exchange is one of the more obvious glories of the Canterbury Tales. Its superiority to predecessors has long been recognized. However, the high quality of Gower's achievement has not been widely acknowledged. The presently accepted view is expressed in a standard work on medieval rhetoric.

> Gower's plan in the Confessio Amantis is no more than a classified series...
> Boccaccio makes each of his ten persons tell a tale each day on the same general theme. Thus, he arranges ten groups of ten tales each, with charming interludes of conversation, song, and description. But only the charm of style saves the connective from monotony. The narrators are merely mouthpieces; the interludes are not used as by Chaucer, to bring about contrast and interchange; the setting, though more attractive than the allegorical fiction of the Confessio Amantis, is merely repeated with variations.[107]

But sufficient evidence for the variety provided by Gower's interludes was presented in Chapter I and sufficient evidence for the relevance of the tales to the lover's plight throughout the study, to demonstrate the high degree of integration achieved in the Confessio.

This high degree of integration is partly a consequence of the attention to architecture that distinguishes

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[107]Charles S. Baldwin, Medieval Rhetoric and Poetic (New York, 1928), p. 299.

both Gower and Chaucer. The Confessio, to be sure, is organized much more tightly than the Canterbury Tales and is therefore in some ways closer to the numerical scheme of the Decameron. Nevertheless, C. S. Lewis is correct when he says of the Confessio's unity:

> But it is not merely external -- not merely one of those abstract excellences which critics can detect while readers fail to feel them. His work is more pleasurable because he has laboured to arrange it well; that is, to arrange it plausibly and with variety. It has, in places, merits of an even higher order; but the beauty of the architectonics is constant.[108]

The uncertainty over Chaucer's ultimate intentions makes a detailed comparison with the Confessio unprofitable. It seems clear that he had a plan although not as clearly thought out in advance as Gower's. Moreover, this plan is designed to serve more than the technical problems of organization. Like Gower's, it is related to an impulse to breadth of vision and philosophic implication whose meaning criticism has not yet succeeded in defining satisfactorily.

The integration of base narrative and tales is not the only achievement of the successful handling of the interludes. As I demonstrated in Chapter I, a substantial amount of the raw material out of which the interludes are woven can be classified as "lore". Chaucer, of course, had demonstrated his ability to handle this intrinsically

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[108]Lewis, p. 201.

heavy matter in a delightful way early in his career. The exchange between Chaucer and the Eagle in the House of Fame is not without similarities to the exchanges between Genius and Amans. Almost every one of Chaucer's major works gives evidence of his interest in every aspect of the intellectual activity of his time. His taste for "lore" would have been an important ingredient in his friendship with Gower. His interest in this material and his instinctive and persistent impulse to transmute it into imaginative literature could not have failed to kindle his appreciation for the Confessio, where such masses had been so triumphantly treated with skill and imagination.

Fisher believes that without Gower there might never have been a Canterbury Tales. This is an exaggerated and untenable claim, especially when based on Gower's didactic works. If Fisher had assigned this role to the Confessio it would still have been exaggerated, unjustified, and unprovable. However, it would have been truer to the literary realities, for it is possible to construct a plausible hypothesis of the way in which the Confessio could have entered into the creation of the Canterbury Tales. In the Legend of Good Women, Chaucer had expressed his interest in the idea of a collection of framed tales. It was, therefore, not the idea of a collection that he needed as much as a vision of what could really be done

with the genre. There is no way to prove that he would not have evolved this vision unaided. But it had to evolve and the analogue best equipped to help him visualize the possibilities was the Confessio. Chaucer and Gower probably started the Legend and the Confessio concurrently. Chaucer soon grew tired of the project -- and with good reason. The original plan for a martyrology of lovers was unnecessarily limiting and the results disappointing. His decision to abandon the Legend and start a new collection might very well have been stimulated by Gower's greater success in his experiment, an experiment which included accomplishments whose mastery was only fully achieved by Chaucer in the Canterbury Tales.

This is a plausible theory but not one for which we are ever likely to find factual verification for the field of action is the inaccessible realm of a particular man's imagination. However, its principal justification and value are not in the establishment of a new cause and effect link in the chain of influences leading to the creation of the Canterbury Tales. It is rather the justification for a consideration of any analogue -- the light it throws on the nature of an accepted masterpiece. However, in this case there is an added justification, for the analogue itself is a major work whose aims have been misunderstood and whose accomplishments have been undervalued. It should also serve to estimate the

proportions between the works more accurately.

This is not to say that the question of influences is trivial. I am convinced that Gower and Chaucer did mutually influence each other. I suspect, however, that this influence is so intimate and subtle that investigation will never yield the sort of hard, discrete facts that should form the stuff of solid scholarship. Nevertheless, it should be possible to increase our awareness of the nature of this influence, for there is much to be learned about Chaucer and Gower, as well as their contemporaries, from a consideration of their relationship. Chaucer had more in common with Gower than with either Langland or the Pearl Poet. They came from the same social class, had access to the same society, wrote in the same dialect for the same audience. They shared the cosmopolitan, continental outlook of this audience. They drew on the same literary background with special emphasis on the courtly poets of France. Their intellectual interests were similar. Both had a taste for the reading and writing of didactic literature. Both were interested in politics. Both balanced these serious interests with a delicate sense of humor.

In view of this common background, it is not surprising that their two greatest works should have so much in common. Nor is it surprising that the view of the world expressed in these works should show so many

similarities. Both have a solid moral core. But in spite of their piety neither has a marked mystical bent. Both are interested in the manifestation of irrational sexual passions. Both, in their best works, view it with a toleration and compassion that never interferes with fine moral discrimination.

These important similarities in no way imply that Gower's artistic achievement is equal to Chaucer's or that there are not important differences in their visions of the world. Chaucer will always exert a greater claim on our attention. In spite of the similarities in outlook, both inhabit unique poetic worlds. The similarities do underline the need to define with more objectivity and discrimination than has hitherto been applied the proportions of their respective achievements and the unique qualities of their respective poetic worlds.

An attempt to estimate the proportion of their achievements is complicated by the fact that our response to Chaucer's artistic powers is influenced by an important aspect of modern ideology, an admiration of the appetitive instincts. Chaucer has produced more works with a greater claim to artistic worth than Gower. Part of our fascination with Chaucer's career is in its record of restless, endless experimentation. The abandoned projects are themselves testimony to his energy and intelligence, and indications of a refusal to be satisfied with merely a competent

performance. Like Milton, Chaucer not only seeks to transform every genre he handles but seems determined to repeat himself as little as possible. The demands of his career as a public servant might be partially responsible for his uncompleted projects. However, this is not really a satisfactory explanation, for he certainly gives the impression -- especially in the Canterbury Tales -- of having more to say than the limitations of mortal existence would allow him to set down. Chaucer wrote out of a surplus and never came near to exhausting his resources. This abundance is evident in the range of his linguistic experiments and a complexity of structure that has not yet exhausted the most refined methods of modern critical analysis. It is evident in a delight in the sheer phenomena of the world and an ability to visualize them that frustrates every attempt to encapsulate his world view, and condemns as inadequate every effort at allegorical interpretation.

When measured by this phenomenon it is not surprising that Gower should for so long have seemed negligible. Gower is fluent and prolific but still produced only one work of imaginative value and with it seems to have exhausted his creative impulse. He never seems to have undertaken more than he could perform. All of his works were not only completed but revised. His personal life seems to have been less active than Chaucer's. His works lack Chaucer's rich variety of human types. Chaucer could not be satisfied with

less than a crowd for his masterpiece. Gower's principal work features one character whose creation required more introspection than familiarity with the world.

All of this is true and misleading. For just as Chaucer's surplus is accompanied by an aesthetic so Gower's more limited resources are compensated for by an aesthetic of their own. Gower's linguistic range is not as wide as Chaucer's. Yet he does have variety. His verse always does what it has to do. If he seldom rises to the sublime he also seldom falls into bathos. He is precise and delicate. His lack of interest in externals is compensated for by a deeper and more persistent concern for his characters' inner life, particularly their basic moral commitments. He knows his limitations and by insisting on working within them has turned them into a positive aesthetic whose principal virtues -- craftsmanship, polish, restraint, discipline, taste, intelligence and understatement -- become not simply an artistic credo but a pattern for a way of looking at the world. Gower's poetic universe is unique. It is not as wide and colorful as Chaucer's but it is not therefore unworthy of our serious attention. Although Chaucer will always have the larger claim on us we are still not so rich that we can afford to disdain Gower's gifts.

APPENDIX

GOWER'S READING

Gower's trilingual fluency implies extensive reading and intensive study in as many languages. He must have been thoroughly familiar with the literature of *courtoisie* in both its lyric and narrative forms. Some scholars are convinced that he was directly acquainted with the troubadour poetry of Provence.[109] Their evidence is not conclusive; but the claim is based upon a recognition of his mastery, in the *Cinkante ballades*, of the conventions derived from this tradition, hence indicates a study of contemporary models if not knowledge of the originals.

Gower's knowledge and use of the French love *récit*, derived from the *Romance of the Rose* and practiced throughout the fourteenth century by the courtly poets of France, including Machaut, Deschamps, and Froissart, have never been systematically investigated. Indeed, according to Fisher, the influence of this tradition upon the *Confessio* is minimal. Fisher's judgment seems perverse in light of both his acknowledgement of the influence of this school

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[109] Jean Audiau, *Les Troubadours et L'Angleterre* (Paris, 1927). Also Fisher, pp. 75-77.

on the Legend of Good Women and his own careful catalogue of the similarities between the Legend and the Confessio. If the Legend and the Confessio are as intimately related in occasion, intent, and form as Fisher believes, it seems reasonable to assume that they would have been subject to the same general influences. Fisher's judgment is consistent with his general view of the Confessio and probably dictated by his persistent impulse to underestimate the strength of Gower's interest in writing a poem about love.

Yet it is difficult to read Wimsatt's descriptive survey without suspecting that this literature is central to the Confessio.[110] Its practitioners firmly established the tradition of elaborate exploitation of analogies between the cult of love and orthodox religion. They refined all of those conventions of love so successfully adopted by Gower. They experimented freely with a mixed narrative combining in various proportions an individual love story, allegory, lyric poetry, and doctrine.

Gower's debt is probably especially strong to the late works of this literature. The Confessio is certainly consistent with two of the principal traits characteristic of the development of this tradition; a decrease in the role of allegory and an increase in the realistic description of scenes from everyday life. Wimsatt describes this

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[110] Chaucer and the French Love Poets.

development with reference to the Remède de Fortune: "For the allegorized setting of the Garden of Love in the Rose, a literal house and an actual garden house have been substituted. In place of the one sided Amant and Amie, whose actions related only to the "old dance" of love, the lovers of Remède de Fortune participate in such other human activities as eating, playing games, and attending Mass. Allegorical narrative has almost disappeared from Remède de Fortune."[111] The trend toward realism is evident in an increasing insistence on the autobiographical convention and the unheroic portrayal of the lover. Both are manifest in Machaut's Navarre. "It is only in Navarre, when the poet and the narrator are explicitly equated that Machaut's conception of his poetic self is developed. He presents himself as frankly cowardly, but at the same time headstrong, conceited, and a man of noble behavior and strong attraction for women."[112]

This poem, which according to its editor also contains an art of love, could have been important to Gower. Finally, the Confessio probably owes much to two more characteristics of the maturing tradition, the expansion of subject matter to include innocent premarital love and

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[111] Ibid., p. 110.

[112] Ibid., p. 99.

married love, and a tendency for a concern with the morality of love to replace a concern with technique. A careful study of Gower's relation to this material might reveal more specific debts. However, it is evident that the Confessio presupposes its assimilation. I suspect that the literature itself has not been adequately understood and is in need of critical evaluation. Perhaps a renewed understanding of the Confessio could throw some retrospective light on the intentions behind these interesting narrative experiments.

C. S. Lewis' use of the Romance of the Rose as a point of departure for his discussion of the Confessio has contributed to the impression that the Romance was of particular importance to Gower. Although it is inconceivable that Gower could have been totally unacquainted with the Romance, I can find no evidence of its having entered directly into the composition of the Confessio. It is difficult to imagine two more unlike sensibilities or opposed ways of viewing the world than those of Gower and Jean de Meun. While the Romance is an important part of the background of the Confessio and essential for a full account of the tradition of Nature and Genius as Gower received it, I suspect the poem's influence on Gower was oblique and generalized.

There is insufficient evidence to estimate accurately Gower's knowledge of other popular medieval romances. The

company of lovers appearing with the god of Love in Book VIII is a common convention and in itself provides no indication of the actual extent of Gower's reading. However, we might recall Amans' confession that:

> Min Ere with a good pitance
> Is fedd of redinge of romance
> Of Ydoine and of Amadas
> (VI, 877)

In view of Gower's almost certain knowledge of Troilus, the constant references to famous lovers throughout his works, and the subject matter of the Confessio, it is difficult to imagine him not acquainting himself with any available versions of this material and it is reasonable to assume that in this case the taste of author and lover are identical.

The breadth of Gower's reading is evident from a survey of the sources for the tales.[113] Ovid provides more stories than any other author, 38 out of 133 according to Pearsall.[114] The Vulgate is next, providing 15 followed by eight from Benoit de Sainte-Maure's Le Roman de Troie and six from Godfrey of Viterbo's Pantheon. Other tales are taken from:

> Guido di Colonna, Historia destructionis troiae
> Vincent of Beauvais, Speculum historiale
> Statius, Thebaid, and Achilliad
> Vita Barlaam et Josephat
> Gesta Romanorum
> Avian, Fables
> Trivet, Anglo-Normal Chronicle

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[113] Based on Macaulay's notes.

[114] "Gower's Narrative Art," p. 478.

Justin, Epitome
Valerius Maximus, Mem.
Rishanger, Chronicle
Hyginus, "Fabularum liber; Poeticon astronimicon"
Roman des Sept Sages
Comedia babionis
Speculum stultorum
Roman de toute Chevalerie, Historia Alexandri de Preliis
Brunetto Latini, Li Livres dou Tresor
Secretum secretorum
Livy, History
Boccaccio, Genealogie deorum gentilium libri
Legenda aurea

Gower's knowledge of Ovid is intimate and inclusive. According to Macaulay, "he borrows from almost every section of his works with the air of one who knows perfectly well where to turn for what he wants."[115] His knowledge of Ovid is equalled by his knowledge of the Vulgate. "There is hardly a book of the Old Testament to which he does not refer, and he seems to be acquainted with Bible history even in its obscurest details."[116] Extensive borrowings from Peter Riga's Aurora, Alexander Neckham's De vita monachorum, the Speculum stultorum and the Pantheon in the Vox indicate intensive study of these texts.[117]

Gower shared the characteristic medieval taste for citations from authorities. The most frequently cited are Seneca, Jerome, Augustine, Gregory, Bernard, and Ambrose. Other quotations are from the distichs of Cato, Cicero,

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[115] Works, IV, p. xxxiii.

[116] Works, I, p. lxi.

[117] Works, IV, p. xxxiii.

Boethius, Cassiodorus, Isidore, Bede. He refers to Chrysostom, Cyprian, Remigius, Albertus Magnus, Helinand, Haymor and Gilbert.

A specific source for the Mirour has not been conclusively identified although Father Dwyer is convinced that Gower worked from Frere Lorens' Somme des Vices et Virtus.[118] Macaulay points out that the Mirour's twelve-line stanza was commonly used in French moral treatises.[119] Therefore, both form and content indicate familiarity with the moral and devotional literature of his time.

It is difficult to believe that Gower was unacquainted with the Consolation of Philosophy. Yet he quotes Boethius only twice in the Confessio (Prol. 1567; II, 260) and one of these is wrong.[120] Furthermore, Professor Jefferson has argued that Gower's conception of Fortune is not altogether Boethian because it is based on the conviction that Fortune comes to man according to his merits.[121] The numerous references to Fortune in the Confessio are conventional enough and in themselves indicate little appreciation of Boethius' conception. Evidently, the Consolation did not rank with the Vulgate and the works of Ovid as a constant and indispensable companion.

But Gower's questionable knowledge of the Consolation does not justify the conclusion that his vision is inferior to or incompatible with Boethius'. It is true that Gower

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[120] Bernard L. Jefferson, Chaucer and the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius (New York, 1916), p. 54.

[121] Ibid., p. 52.

sometimes talks as if Job's comforters were correct and suffering were conclusive proof of moral failure. However, in the tales misfortune falls impartially upon just and unjust. In his repeated assertions of man's moral responsibility I believe Gower is trying to say that a man's character is his fate.

> So that the man is overal
> His oghne cause of wel and wo.
> That we Fortune clep so
> Out of the man himself it groweth.
> (Prol. 546)

This becomes intelligible and the essential harmony of his view of life with that of Boethius becomes clear when we realize that Venus in the Confessio occupies somewhat the same position as Fortune in the Consolation. Indeed, at one point the identification is made explicit.

> Bot sche which kepth the blinde whel,
> Venus, whan thei be moste above,
> In al the hoteste of here love,
> Hire whiel sche torneth, and thei felle
> In the manere as I schal telle.
> (I, 2490)

Like Fortune in the Consolation Venus is irresistible, unpredictable, and part of the Divine plan for the universe. No man is immune to her operations but the manner in which he deals with her vagaries is subject to his determination. On the deepest level Gower and Boethius are not incompatible. However, there is no way of estimating how much Gower's vision owes to the Consolation of Philosophy.

This survey is obviously not a definitive description of Gower's reading. The sources of some of the tales are unknown. Many of the citations are undoubtedly from commonplace books. Even allowing for differences between modern and medieval reading habits, it would be strange if Gower's reading were restricted to those works which have left definable traces in his writing.

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