

WRITING THE LITERARY ZODIAC:
DIVISION, UNITY, AND POWER IN JOHN GOWER'S POETICS

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This dissertation explores attitudes toward literary form in fourteenth-century London's trilingual culture and what it means to package science, politics, and social upheaval as literature. John Gower, the author of substantial poems in the three languages of his day treating topics as varied as clerical greed, aristocratic vice, rebellion, astronomy, and alchemy, writes at the intersection of literature, history, and science. Though called a historian and a compiler, Gower was foremost a poet whose political, cultural, and scientific writings grew out of his sense of poetry as a whole built from smaller pieces.

Division was a force Gower feared, yet exploited. Though Gower critiques the broken political body, most famously in his treatment of the 1381 Rebellion but also throughout his many writings on politics, division could also signify marvelous design. To Gower, the music of the mythical harper Arion is not pure magic but a technical product of "measure," a word signifying notes organized in a pattern. Similarly, the stars of the zodiac are divided into signs, and alchemy, though it transforms diverse metals, requires divided elements before it can unite them through an elaborate process of refinement. Gower examines the sciences' negotiation between division and harmony as a way of articulating his own poetic project. Division is a theme throughout his corpus, physically rendered by the metaphor of the body—be it

zodiacal, alchemical, political, bestial, incestuous, or verbal—and thus the body's valences are multiplied by examining its parts as well as its whole structure. Division is not always something to be feared; it can be a way to know an object more fully by examining its detailed composition.

Broadly speaking, the chapters investigate Gower's poetic experiment with parts and wholes. Chapters One and Two explore the parts and wholes of language. Meaningful play in rhyme words can underscore words within words and differences in words that appear the same. Syllabic play, meanwhile, allows a poet to build words from pieces. Chapter Three investigates Gower's attitude toward alchemy, the process of converting base metals to gold, or multiplicity to singularity. While Gower lauds this science, he is aware of language's limitations in engaging in this process; words generate more words, and translations lose the secrets of older texts composed in other languages. In Chapter Two I discussed the bodies of the 1381 rebels, allegorized as beasts with hybrid forms, while Chapter Four explores processes of change in composite bodies, including the zodiac man, Nebuchadnezzar's Statue of Precious Metals, and the Greek pantheon as an anatomical man. Chapter Five contrasts Chaucer's and Gower's literary presentation of astronomy; Chaucer's *House of Fame* seeks authority in literature, while Gower's praise of science is for its own sake. Gower's treatise is given a literary spin in the manner in which Gower writes of the constellations as objects that operate as couplets, both of which engage in meaningful repetition and productive duality. Chapter Six treats linguistic composite bodies through the theme of incest in riddles as developed in Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme* and *Confessio Amantis*.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Kim Zarins is a medievalist who has taught courses at Cornell University, San Francisco State University, and Santa Clara University. In the fall 2009 she will be an Assistant Professor of English at the California State University at Sacramento. She has published chapters in book collections on Victorian medievalism, Shakespeare's medieval cultural contexts, and John Gower. She also is the author of a children's book. She lives with her husband and son in Northern California.

To Mark and Arthur

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Introduction

Division and Gower's Body of Work

One of my favorite articles on John Gower was written by a non-medievalist. When Christopher Ricks writes about Gower's poetry, his little chapter stands out in Minnis' volume for its unfettered look at poetry above all else: he is not compelled to locate source studies, footnote debates on Gower's ethics, take history as his lens, or do anything beyond reading the poetry and exploring its "verbal felicities" alongside other poets old and new.¹ His formalist outlook contributes to an older discussion among medievalists begun by C. S. Lewis and continued by J. A. Burrow and Derek Pearsall: Gower's language, to these readers, is plain yet provocatively so. Ricks asks, "Is he an ordinary writer, or one who uses the ordinary?"² I will start with an answer—that Gower uses the ordinary—as a given, and investigate the method to his simplicity, which involves the simple use of parts combined in complex ways. In bringing together words, texts, and metaphors of bits and pieces, Gower harnesses plainness to equivocal ends.

Let me illustrate this belying simplicity with one of Gower's tales, in which an unrequited lover "besoghte" his lady's love but could make no headway; with no "lacche," he had nothing left to do but "wacche" her from a distance (2.108-110).³ Frozen in stationary desire, the unrequited lover experiences the painful truth that while he remains in stasis, his beloved takes on a "lusti love" (124). When the outcast "Stod and behield the lusti love" of this "bachelor" and lady as they "stod" close

¹ Christopher Ricks, "Metamorphosis in Other Words," in *The Force of Poetry* (Clarendon: Oxford, 1984), 1. First printed in *Gower's 'Confessio Amantis': Responses and Reassessments*, ed. A. J. Minnis (London: D. S. Brewer, 1983).

² Ricks, *Force of Poetry*, 3.

³ John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell Peck (Kalamazoo, MI: TEAMS Medieval Institute Press, vol. 2, 2003). All quotations from the *Confessio Amantis* are from Peck's three-volume edition. All translations of the *Confessio's* Latin are by Andrew Galloway, from Peck's edition.

together one day, his stasis, along with his dream deferred, explodes in a conflagration of passionate rage (141, 146, 125):

[When he] Stod and behield the lusti love
Which ech of hem to other made
With goodly chiere and wordes glade,
That al his herte hath sette afyre
Of pure Envie: and as a fyre
Which fleth out of a myhti bowe,
Aweie he fledde for a throwe,
As he that was for love wod,
Whan that he sih how that it stod. (2.146-154)

Like fire itself, the passage builds in intensity, stoked by Gower's careful attention to his main character's psychology. The burning is described with a broken *rime riche* couplet (*afyre* and *a fyre*, a rhyme pair that looks the same, except one word is broken in two). Like is rhymed with like, fueling the spurned lover with the repeated image that maddens him, and a rhyme *afire* traverses the boundaries of standard rhyme. Enjambment, meanwhile, breaches the line's limits; fire knows no boundaries. Just as suddenly, though, upon the word, "stod," which brings us back to the prior usage that sets the lover in motion, we come full circle, back at rest—not at peace, but come to a cold and shocking surprise in the line following this conflagration of a passage: "This Polipheme a geant was" (155).

I played a little trick on you by withholding Poliphemus' name until now, since you know the story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 13. Gower, however, uses a similar strategy of secrecy in making us walk in Poliphemus' shoes before telling us the shoe size. Only after building the plot to a climax does Gower reveal the man's monstrous form. C. S. Lewis equates this delayed information with cheating and considers the scene one of Gower's "failures": "possibly no other narrator ever allowed a story to get under weigh, as Gower does in *Acis and Galatea*, before telling us—and that in a most casual parenthesis—that one of the three characters involved, and already set in

action, is a Giant.”⁴ To Lewis, it lacks the feel of a strategic delay as one might find in other fourteenth-century poets. For example, the *Gawain* poet describes the Green Knight’s physique in detail before actually mentioning that he is green; once spoken, the *Gawain* poet cannot stop talking about the knight’s greenness.

Gower’s choice to withhold the information is equally strategic, not to play a trick on us by building upon and then exceeding our expectations, as the *Gawain* poet does, but to complicate a character portrayal at the heart of the story. The delay blurs the nature of Poliphemus’ divided self—greenness may be the *sine qua non* of the Green Knight (at least until we find out in another bit of delayed information that Sir Bertilak is his true identity), but gigantism is not all there is to Poliphemus. The choice not to tell all allows readers to think of him as a lover, situated in a natural landscape of volcanic mountains that reflect his psychological turmoil. Until his gigantism is mentioned, he resembles Amans, who declares, shortly before this tale, that he burns at seeing others receive his lady’s favor:

Ethna, which brenneth yer be yere,
Was thanne noght so hot as I
Of thilke sor which prively
Min hertes thoght withinne brenneth. (2.18-21)

Burning like Amans, Poliphemus does not seem so monstrous, for Gower presents Poliphemus as a green-eyed rather than a one-eyed monster. It is unclear whether his monstrosity (of the one-eyed variety) was there all along. It is in Ovid—Poliphemus’ attempts at hygiene and *ars amatoria* are brutally satirized, and it is difficult to sympathize with a Cyclops combing grizzled hair or batting his single eye at a beautiful girl. A Cyclops does not deserve a beautiful girl, but a man might, and it is

⁴ C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Clarendon: London, 1951), 209. I will be discussing another of Gower’s “failures,” *The Beggars and the Pastries*, in the chapter on rhyme.

as a man that Gower presents Polyphemus for most of the story. Only when Poliphemus breaks down with murder on his mind do we learn he is a giant.

The conflagration of emotions seems to stretch Poliphemus into a monster. His turmoil is expressed in the mad dash around the hillside, which is Gower's contribution to the Ovidian narrative. In the lines immediately following Poliphemus' transformation into a giant, Gower again emphasizes a metamorphosis into bestial behavior based on ocular proof:

This Polipheme a geant was,
And whan he sih the sothe cas,
How Galathee him hath forsake
And Acis to hire love take,
His herte mai it noght forbere
That he ne roreth lich a bere;
And as it were a wilde beste,
The whom no reson mihte areste,
He ran Ethna the hell aboute,
Wher nevere yit the fyr was oute,
Fulild of sorghe and gret desese,
That he syh Acis wel at ese. (2.155-166)

Again the couplet rhymes mirror Poliphemus' emotional change and its physical effects, first in fire and next in a metamorphosis. *Forbere / bere / beste*. Unable to forbear his own emotions, he gives into them and figuratively becomes a bear. So changed into a beast, he is protected from reason and self-knowledge, and can seek murder as a means of licking his wounds. Reason would "areste" him, but that stillness resembles the discarded lover's bounded stasis, which he must flee at all costs, even if that means running like fire on the hillside (or the Hell-side, as line 163 suggests); murdering Acis, not by human means of weaponry but by bestial strength; and forcing Galatea into becoming alone, like him. Even the gods are put in stasis, angry but strangely unable to act at the tale's inconclusive, metrically choppy close, which ends mid-line before Genius' abrupt shift to moralizing wrap-up material: "For

his Envie and his hate / Thei were wrothe. And thus algate / Mi sone, thou myht understonde . . .” (199-201). Poliphemus gets away with it, and he silences gods, priest, and poet alike.

Murder is monstrous behavior, but the tale indicates a descent into monstrosity, not constant depravity or even a sign of Poliphemus giving in to the monster that he was all along. Is his voyeurism an indication of his creepy monstrosity or a characteristic of his frozen agony, so typical of lovers from Troilus to Amans? Either way, by not introducing the character as monstrous, Gower’s character portrayal is humanitarian—more so than Ovid’s brutal treatment of a brute longing for humanity. In Gower, Poliphemus was not wrong to love a woman; his error was his consuming envy.

Ovid’s shadow lies on the text in another way, for Gower’s unprecedented blur between man and monster is complicated by a *divisio textus*. The Latin gloss is more Ovidian in its concise character assessment, no sooner naming Poliphemus than telling us his main attribute, at least to medieval readers: *Poliphemus Gigas*.⁵ Introducing his gigantism at the outset brands Poliphemus as monstrous. Moreover, Poliphemus is mentioned late in the gloss, which follows the point of view of Acis, whose love is painted in the conventional superlatives of romance. Acis is a young knight (*iuuenis miles*) given to absolute yet chaste adoration (*toto corde*) of his lady, *pulcherissima* Galatea. No sooner do they enjoy one another’s conversation than Poliphemus breaks forth like a demonic *deus ex machina* to destroy Acis and to attempt to rape Galatea—or at least he wanted to attempt it, the gloss claims, though Neptune (Poliphemus’ father) prevented him (*Galatheam rapere voluisset, Neptunus Giganti obsistens*).

⁵ As a side note, it is curious that Poliphemus was branded by his size rather than his single eye, which is not mentioned in English text or Latin gloss. On the one hand, this supports a more human image of Poliphemus, but a giant is by no means more benign: a man with one eye is disabled, but a giant is grotesquely enabled, and as such can threaten civilization.

With Acis as the main character, Poliphemous is nothing but a monster, *Invidia* personified. The only glance into his point of view is the peek at a murderer's envy and a rapist's lust.

Thus two separate accounts stand side by side: the text is *The Tale of Poliphemus*, the gloss is *The Tale of Acis*. Should we privilege the vernacular tale or the Latin summary; do we choose man or monster? Equally uncertain is what Gower means by this division of texts. Does he wish us to choose, and if so, are we supposed to know the right answer—or are both texts true? *The Tale of Poliphemus* (and here I cast my vote), though one story of many in the *Confessio* and not given any particular emphasis, is an example of Gower's detail-work that connects on a fundamental level with his larger project. It is a part of his larger architectonics, as Lewis intuitively perceived elsewhere: "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."⁶ Gower's Latin gloss serves to underscore his English poem's innovation by conflicting with it. The friction is an overt pointing device for readers who may have missed Gower's adaptation, and Gower has no qualms about showing the Latin scaffolds that support his vernacular structure. Furthermore, one could add Lewis' statement that the architectonics are constant, but the landscapes and characters themselves were in flux and change: Gower possessed a "devotion to movement and progression, [a] preoccupation with things that change as you watch them."⁷ So, too, with Poliphemus, who is not condemned from the beginning but is allowed to love and to fail in love. So, too, with Amans.

⁶ Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, 201.

⁷ Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, 207.

Poliphemus' brief story, lending itself to both critiques of division and synthesis, ignites many scholars with Etna's fires. Readers underscore the division of the irresolvable text, lacking clear authority. Diane Watt and Peter Nicholson debate the ethical reading of the poem. Watt perceives the inherent fragmentation of the text, but to her, this is not the end but the beginning of a reader's engagement with the *Confessio*, for the fragmentation allows for a reader to make decisions and interpret the text and its ethics freely. Nicholson, in turn, has argued for a coherent *Confessio*, whose tales completely support Amans in his development as a lover and a man, and that the ethics of a lover resemble the ethics of a good Christian. Both scholars have contributed to this present study. Nicholson aptly writes that Poliphemus' tale is "an example of the private, furtive, self-consuming Envy that Amans suffers," though he refrains from a closer comparison due to Amans' quiet nature and Poliphemus' brutality.⁸ He persuasively brings the *Confessio* together as a harmonious whole, a story with a beginning, middle, and end all centered on the Amans frame story. However, I wonder, like Watt, at the cost of Nicholson's achievement—the cost, for example, of refusing to comment upon the delayed information of Poliphemus as a giant and the delayed information of Amans as an old man, perhaps in reluctance to taint Amans with Poliphemus' monstrosity. Moreover, by making every book, every story, apply to Amans and his lover's dilemma, one must leave out the parts that do not apply to him and yet are also central to the poem. For example, Gower's colophon cites Nebuchadnezzar's dream and Book 7 as what the poem is "about," in addition to the Amans story, not as a part of his story. Gower's text, saturated in social criticism, scientific lore, and literary art, to name but a few things, is too rich to pin down to one narrative, however important Amans' story may be.

⁸ Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics in Gower's Confessio Amantis* (University of Michigan Press: Ann Arbor, 2005), 162.

I have more in common with Watt (not least because we like to write about the same moments in the text), but my approach is more formalist than hers. Also, she is more attentive to ways we can read Gower now “albeit in terms that Gower and his contemporaries may never have considered.”⁹ My focus is not on that dynamic but rather to what end these moments of division—be it the divide between text and gloss or man and monster—operate within Gower’s poetics. Though they seem to conflict, division and harmony both serve Gower’s creative energy. Watt investigates Gower’s fragmentation for its resonance with modern theoretical discourse; I am interested in the fragmentation of the Poliphemus tale and elsewhere because it is *orchestrated* by Gower—with formalist and ethical implications. Division is humanizing rather than demonizing to Poliphemus, as well as to other characters in the pages of this dissertation. It is a fascinating prospect that fragmentation could be an ethical tool rather than one to undermine morality. A poetics of division allows Gower to invest his characters—many of them outcasts, women, or peasants—with a voice that they would not have otherwise attained.

That is how I read the Poliphemus story, having met him first as a lover. The couplet rhymes discussed indicate the lover’s psychology, and the minor tale itself reflects questions of division and continuity that ask the reader to reconsider its characters in light of its new information. The division of Poliphemus’ self could be seen as yet another example of pessimism in Gower’s poetry. Hugh White notes the endemic, divided nature of the *Confessio* as a text that fails to balance its competing claims for lust and lore (love and virtue), and that by Book 8 the reader receives no new answers but merely a return to the starting point.¹⁰ For this, White calls the poem a failure that concerns itself with its own acknowledgement of division and failure.

⁹ Diane Watt, *Amoral Gower*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xiv.

¹⁰ Hugh White, “Division and Failure. in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*,” *Neophilologus* 72 (1988), 600-16.

While I admire White's insights on division and his questions regarding previous assumptions made about the poem, I would say rather that Poliphemus' story is one of many in which division allows us to see more of the person from all sides, resulting not in failure but greater completion. Gower could have written a text to match his gloss but opted for inconsistency. He may not juggle his allegiances to Venus and Christianity with perfect poise, he may contradict himself, but the humanity that comes through in stories such as this one to my mind means that the poem is not at all a failure, for it experiments with ways to rethink what divides and unifies us. The poem admits incompatibility and the lack of a singular voice of authority even as it gives a voice to various women, monsters, and menials in the stories. For this humanitarian abundance, for this anatomy of a giant as a person and as a poem, it was a work worth writing, and a poetics worth considering.

The Trilingual Giant

Fourteenth-century poet and "friend of Chaucer" John Gower is more accessible now than he has been in centuries.¹¹ At the turn of the new millennium, Russell Peck brought the *Confessio* to the graduate and undergraduate classroom with his affordable, three-volume edition based on Macaulay's august but expensive edition circa 1900. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* included Gower in its 8th edition, published in 2006.¹² An international multi-day conference in 2008 at Queen

¹¹ The influential phrase is from John Hurt Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: New York University Press, 1964).

¹² *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Eighth Edition, Volume A: The Middle Ages*, ed. Alfred David and James Simpson (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006).

Mary University of London devoted itself to the previously neglected author. “The Age of Gower,” as the conference was called, has come.

With that arrival also emerge questions how to situate Gower in his time without comparisons made at his expense—he shares narrative material with Chaucer and politics with Langland, though his conservative, “moral” persona works against him as much as Poliphemus has trouble distancing himself from the appellation *Gigas*. This very issue of context brings us to the more fraught question of how to situate Gower within himself, within his gigantic and divided poetic corpus. His comprehensiveness is unwieldy, both revealing and concealing his purpose and persona: much ink has been shed on Chaucer’s and Langland’s personae, but Gower’s is still minimally addressed. A case in point is his self-commissioned tomb at Southwerk Cathedral. There Gower, beautifully dressed in red and gold, rests in effigy upon a pillow of his three great works, also in effigy, and also beautifully dressed in red and gold—that is, gold-paged volumes bound in red leather and with a green leather strap. They are thick, authoritative tomes (and do not look altogether comfortable as pillows). The books appear with the spines to the left, so that we are looking at the books oriented toward us, as though ready to be opened, were it not for Gower’s head lying in our way. Inscribed on their gold sides are the titles of Gower’s three great works written in the three languages of his day with authoritative Latin titles: top to bottom we find *Vox Clamantis*, *Speculum Meditantis*, and *Confessio Amantis*.

The separate blocks of Latin, French, and English give signs of a conscious poetic career, modeled on Latin and specifically Virgilian tripartite authority. Does the ordering, like Virgil’s ascent from pastoral to epic, indicate a hierarchy, though with language rather than genre, and if a hierarchy is intended, what is it? If Latin is

on top because of its highest authority and importance, then one must wonder why late in his career Gower bothered to write the *Confessio* at all. Or is the *Confessio*, figured at the bottom as slightly larger in the pyramid of texts, actually the foundational piece to Gower's corpus, upon which the French and Latin works must stand? Are the three books mentioned just because, or are we to perceive a grand unified theory to all this?

It is a riddle one cannot resist, unsubstantiated though one's responses must be. One solution is to synthesize, yet such efforts have proved disappointing. John Hurt Fisher began the trend when he asserted that in essence Gower single-mindedly wrote the same poem three times in the three different languages of his day.¹³ Some readers still take this argument at face value, though it is difficult to write about Gower without choosing one language with minimal discussion of other texts, because Gower is a more proficient trilingual writer than we are trilingual readers. The *Vox* critics tend to focus on Gower's politics, the *Mirour* critics on the estates and social criticism, and some *Confessio* readers focus on politics in the Prologue and Book 7 while others focus on the Amans frame story. That there is little synthesis between these separate camps makes interpretive work seem incomplete, yet discussing the three poems as the same work on the sins and social states is as reductive as labeling Poliphemus *Gigas*.

Gower's threesome of languages, I believe, are not a Virgilian, hierarchical pyramid but the vital chapters that make his poetics. The three works, colored to match his garments painted on the tomb at Southwerk Cathedral, clothe him. Latin is the cohesive structural element to his linguistic corpus, both in terms of apparatus and the titles which link the works in language and in polysyllabic rhyme. Gower makes himself accessible to us in the terms with which he views his poetic project—through division. I do not take a syncretic view that Gower's three poems are all the same, nor

¹³ John Hurt Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer*, 135.

a notion of Gower's poetic career in which he sheds his French and Latin cocoon to rise with English wings. The *Confessio* rises above the *Vox* or *Mirour* in beauty and pleasurable storytelling, yet those earlier poems are the seedbed without which the *Confessio* would have not come to fruition, not without being a very different poem. To show this continuity of poetics I do not rely on a chronological account of Gower's works, because in charting instances in which Gower explores the details nested within words and the world, and how parts affect wholes, I am drawn to show the recursive nature of Gower's poetic and its wider implications as Gower pairs the abstract with the physical, words with things. With its scientific content, the *Confessio* is Gower's most thorough exploration and fullest statement of this confluence of verbal and physical material, so I focus much of this study on the English poem, but I point out shared moments in the *Vox* or *Mirour* that reflect Gower's poetics, whether it is similar subject matter, shared poetic devices, or echoed phrasing. I assemble the chapters around such shared moments not to show a static Gower in the terms Fisher recounts—a single-minded author of three poems all about the estates and sins—but of a man whose way of seeing things remains even when he writes very different poems.

A simple case in point, discussed more fully in Chapter Four, can be drawn from the *Mirour*: Gower notes that Fraud switches “craie pour fourmage” (25302).¹⁴ It is an odd expression that makes more sense poetically in the *Confessio*, in which Gower twice describes a fraudulent swap of “chalk for chese” (CA Prol 416, 2.2346). The alliteration explains part of Gower's affection for what was probably a proverbial phrase, but the *Mirour* reveals that even without the sound play, manipulations of matter interested Gower early in his career: the phrase is employed in both poems with

¹⁴ All quotations from the *Mirour* are from G. C. Macaulay, *The Works of John Gower: The French Works* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1899). All translations of the *Mirour* are from *Mirour de l'Omme (The Mirror of Mankind)*, trans. by William Burton Wilson (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1992).

social commentary as its ostensible purpose, but what interests me is the metaphoric vehicle of metamorphosis that Gower uses again and again when he treats such matters as alchemy, Nebuchadnezzar's Statue of Precious Metals, Ovidian metamorphosis, wordplay, and riddles. This phrase, 'chalk for cheese,' exemplifies Gower's way of looking at things that change and writing about them, which was a part of his essential poetics. The issue of separating Gower's social commentary from his poetics is important, because it explains Gower's fullest motivations for writing the way he does: the motivation to write "craie pour fourmage" exhibits an interest in the material world, the same interest that will explain Gower's shift in writing about alchemy. In the *Mirour*, his treatment of alchemy is scathing social commentary equating alchemy with fraud; in the *Confessio*, Gower lauds alchemy as art. Dropping the social commentary in the *Confessio*, he praises the sense of detail and process that result in the transformation of matter from base metals to gold ("craie pour fourmage" made true). His favored pairings of words and things, abstract and physical, find their outlet in this intriguing treatise in which language, not charlatan alchemists, is problematized, and Gower echoes the *Mirour* insofar as language is suggestively fraudulent. To sum up, the *Confessio*'s vision is better understood not in its divergence from his past works—Gower's own past works are not worthless *craie*—but in its shared sense of detail and attention to parts and wholes.

Gower thinks in pieces. It is how he summarizes his poetic achievement and makes poetry. He is a cherry-picker of detail *par excellence*—he lifts Ovid's lines and pieces of lines for his *Vox*, selects biblical and classical exempla for his *Mirour* and *Confessio*, window dresses his English text with a Latin apparatus. Thus, rather than focus on Gower the grand synthesizer, we should first understand Gower the master of small parts—the how, when, and whys of literary appropriation, of his own work and others. The more microcosmic the focus, the richer the results; no syllable seems too

small for Gower's sense of detail. However, Gower does not embrace division and detail for their own separateness but for their connectedness to a larger whole. My hope in this project is to show both: how division leads to harmony, from the concatenated constellations above Gower's head to the words he composes, line by line, syllable by syllable.

I should add that this approach positions me more as a Prologue and Book 7 reader, and somewhat less as a reader of the frame story, because the key images of fragmentation are in the former, as well as in the poem's other so-called digressions from the frame story (e.g., Book 4's treatise on alchemy; Book 5's treatise on religion). These encyclopedic sections are central to my investigation of language, division, and wholeness. However, Amans and Genius are also relevant to this discussion, in part simply because of the critical debate about the nature of Amans and Genius' relationship—whether it is a *Bildungsroman*, as James Simpson called it, or something more in line with the division and harmony that characterizes the scientific portions of Gower's poem.¹⁵ In her book on narratology and medieval French literature, Evelyn Birge Vitz argues against imposing a plot upon medieval texts that seem more comfortable with stasis than modern readers wish to allow, and she cautions against the pitfalls of imposing character development where there is none.¹⁶ In essence, she fights against grand unification theories, asserting that the medieval writer and reader do not require the same insistence on plot and narrative flow that we expect. It seems procrustean to read the *Confessio* as a tale of progressive growth in Amans and Genius that becomes prominent in Book 4, as Simpson argues, paving the way for further character development in Book 7, with our protagonists ready to

¹⁵ James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's Anticlaudianus and John Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 13.

¹⁶ Evelyn Birge Vitz, *Medieval Narrative and Modern Narratology: Subjects and Objects of Desire* (New York: New York University Press, 1989).

graduate by Book 8. Georgiana Donavin, in turn, argues that Genius progressively must tell stories about incest until he gets his morals right, and that this sequence is central to a projection of Genius' ethical development.¹⁷ Specifically Donavin argues that in Book 3 Genius wrongly condones the lovers Canacee and Machaire, but eventually he improves morally, and by Book 8 he knows that all incest is always evil.

When I read such developmental arguments, I worry about mapping Genius' progress so precisely, for such so-called moral improvements seem too tidily graphed in an x equals y trajectory. Such readings also eliminate the Poliphemuses of the poem; surely in narrating a tale without labels, Gower's humanism shines through his treatment of the sibling lovers. The trouble with reading Gower's world in terms of ethics and a *Bildungsroman* is that the poem can be made to resemble the gymnasium from George Bernard Shaw's *Man and Superman*, designed solely for the moral augmentation of its characters. It is reductive to assume that Amans and Genius gain character story by story, until at last they are fully educated morally by the poem's end. It suggests that Amans has been systematically prepared, an assumption that is not compatible with the genuine surprise Amans experiences when Genius advocates giving up his love and Venus dismisses Amans from her court. The new information about his old age—except, perhaps, in manuscripts that make this clear in the poem's initial frontispiece—is a Poliphemus moment. One could take an Ovidian interpretation of this news (i.e., the monster—or old man—did not deserve the girl and was never a real lover in the first place), or one could recognize the humanitarian move on Gower's part to suppress labels until the last possible moment. Age-blind, we have thought of Amans as a lover all along, and there is a strong residual impression of that role as part of him, even if Venus's age discrimination insists on

¹⁷ Georgiana Donavin, *Incest Narratives and the Structure of Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Victoria, B.C.: English Literary Studies, 1993).

Amans' inadequacy. She drives home her point and punchline with *rime riche*: "Mi medicine is noght to sieke / For thee and for suche olde sieke" (8.2367-8). Gower personally disregarded such counsel, unless we are to believe that his marriage late in life to Agnes Gray was platonic. Diane Watt made the observation that Gower's text steps outside of his own ethical system and argues not that Gower is amoral but that his text is, lending itself to readings including those, as mentioned before, "never intended by the author or his contemporaries."¹⁸ However, in the case of ruthlessly criticizing older men in love, the text presents the reverse scenario: Gower the aged lover and author is holding Gower the persona up to moral standards that he personally did not attain. By this assessment, it is not Gower's text that is out of the poet's control but the man himself. Since there is no evidence that Gower the man saw himself as out of control by marrying Agnes, we must instead consider that Gower is not being completely upfront with us, just as Venus and Genius were not completely upfront with Amans in the first place (Venus could have saved readers a lot of time if she had been).

Rather than argue for a plot-based, ethical, and developmental reading, which is a dominant way of reading the *Confessio*, set forth by Simpson and others, I read the *Confessio* as something more in line with White's appraisal of the *Confessio* as a continual experiment. Amans and love are certainly central to that experiment, but so too is the role of poetry. To some extent Amans is an occasion for stories rather than a protagonist, and by extension, the frame story—Amans' need to confess—actually serves the author's purpose as an excuse for poetry. A lot of it. Genius tells story after story, and Amans listens for hours, weeks, perhaps even years; it is just possible that he began the tale as a young man who then literally spends his life listening to stories. Either way, this is a lot of listening on Amans' part, an ability not to be found

¹⁸ Watt, *Amoral Gower*, xiv.

in the lovers of Machaut or *The Knight's Tale*. A lover is defined by his need to speak of his love and seek mercy, not to listen to other men tell tales of such diverse material as Nebuchadnezzar as a wild man, a description of world religions, a woman drinking from skull cup, a sample of Caesar's rhetoric, and tales of oppressive fathers and incestuous pairs. Pandarus must abstain from off-topic tales that would irritate Troilus, who blurts, "What knowe I of the queene Nyobe? / Lat be thyne olde ensamples, I the preye" (*TC* 1.759-60).¹⁹ Troilus resents the sententious matter that Amans embraces, and unlike some of his Canterbury contemporaries, Amans does not interrupt stories. That appetite for stories is the key to Amans. Eight hundred pages of octosyllabic couplets would not have been possible without Amans' eagerness for more.

On some level, the frame story is a front, because Amans / Gower is at heart a poet in love with poetry rather than a woman. Even as Gower asserts in Book 8 that medicine cannot cure a lover's heart, moments later Cupid's quick surgery and Venus' ointment do the job in a straightforward, no-nonsense manner. After the procedure, Amans / Gower revs up to his new mission of writing poetry—arguably the *Confessio* itself, a self-conscious poem about a man writing a book. Gower inserts this self-reflective theme in the first recension of the poem's Prologue; when Richard asks him for "Som newe thing," which will become the *Confessio Amantis*, Gower gladly undertakes the project in spite of an unnamed "seknesse" hindering him (Prol. 51, 79). As the end of the poem, after Venus labels Gower as old and sick and assigns Gower the task of writing a book, suggestively the *Confessio*, Gower seems to be asking us to imagine him writing the beginning, and the whole affair of unrequited lover and his companion the storyteller, down to final lines. It is a recursive moment completely in

¹⁹ All Chaucer quotations are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

line with Gower's mirror scene in Book 8, his Poliphemus moment. He enjoys the surprise of self-reflection and the instigation for rereading with that new information in mind. He is not trying to argue us out of being lovers but to seduce us into being readers and listeners of tales.

Division and the Body

My project is to write about Gower's poetics of division and joining separate parts, and how his poetry reflects his poetic interests even if he is ostensibly writing about something else—be it a lover's confession, an estates satire, the zodiac, or a peasant's rebellion. Very useful to scholarship has been the work on Gower as a historian and as a social and ethical visionary; much less has been said of Gower the poet. Yet as Watt and others have commented, Gower's works do not hang together under the historical and ethical rubrics. He seems so orderly, but his works belie that appearance. His *Vox* 1 has animal metamorphoses that seem so histrionic that readers have found it a disorderly response to social disorder. His *Mirour* tells the story of preparation for a battle between the daughters of Sin and the daughters of God, yet the battle is never described, and Gower merely moves on to a new topic, never to return. Lastly, the *Confessio* is a divided book of love, politics, science, and incongruent ethics. Genius repeatedly offers morals that often seem to miss the point (though he can often be quite humane and insightful, too), while Latin glosses often do an even worse job of crystallizing what a tale is about. Already mentioned has been the apparent digressive content of the *Confessio*—the sciences in Book 7 or alchemy in Book 4. Such passages, having little to do with Amans, have been read as products of Gower's encyclopedic urge, solely to lend authority to his text—an explanation which

marginalizes those portions of the text as authoritative ornament without deeper meaning.

Division in Gower, however, is not a flaw but a sign of Gower allowing language to do its thing. The following chapters will provide close readings of such seeming flaws and find the intricacy and the paradoxical order at work within them. The house is divided, yet it stands. By pausing throughout the dissertation over passages that show the challenges and interest of this issue, I wish to convey Gower's tactile feel of language on the tongue and in the hand, the minute choices of syllables and rhyme, and how all writing is a kind of building through the applied division of parts; unity and cohesion are built through division.

John Gower's fascination with division has been mentioned by a number of scholars. Readers have noticed the fixation on disorder and division so prominent in the *Confessio's* Prologue. Rita Copeland has pointed out that division is, in fact, divided.²⁰ As a noun, a condition, it signifies fragmentation, disorder, ruination. As a verb, however, it signals the human ability to discern, parse, clarify—to repair division, as it were. The medieval period shows a love-hate relationship with division and fear of fragmentation and social disorder, yet division is a prerequisite for unity, for we know things by their parts, and division involves discernment. Sir Gawain's pentangle is representative. The symbol of five interconnected lines shows seamless unity, yet the narrator, at pains to convey the symbol's virtues, disrupts the narrative to explain its meaning by breaking the pentangle down into five sets of five (see lines 627ff). Copeland sees Gower mourning social *divisioun* and repairing matters with *divisio textus*, although, as we saw in the clash between text and gloss concerning

²⁰ Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991/1995).

Poliphemus, the relationship between *divisioun* and *divisio textus* goes deeper than this, and *divisio textus* can be an instigator of division rather than a means for repair.

John Fyler's recent book *Language and the Declining World* approaches division as a force in late medieval literature, which locates the tainted aspect to language and society in Genesis and Biblical commentary.²¹ In his account, division among humanity occurred as early as the fig leaves, by joining and taking apart what should have been left alone. Civilization, then, is predicated on division: Cain famously divides his harvest, keeping the best for himself. He then divides his walled city from the outside world and divides his lands and invents weights and measures, turning trade into a finely-tuned exercise in division. His descendent Lamech (Fyler alludes to Lamach's double nature for being the second of that name) is a double murderer and double husband, and the father of those who operate through division: Jubal invents harmony, Tubalcain forges, Noemi weaves. The arts are born from these tainted origins, and man's fallen, unredeemable language continues down its degenerative path to Chaucer's day. Fyler uses Gower as a backdrop to showcase Chaucer's chaotic use of language and his pessimism about language's arbitrary signification. Inheriting Jean de Meun's sense of language, Chaucer critiques language as unredeemable and fallen, yet he appears liberated doing so.

Despite this image of Gower as the more orderly contemporary, Gower scholars have been noticing problems with Gower's supposedly ordered language—his linguistic *measure*. His *divisio textus* is divided, with text and gloss so at odds occasionally as to imitate Babel and generate multiple voices rather than speak one narrative. Moreover, on a fundamental level one cannot divide without falling into

²¹ John Fyler, *Language and the Declining World in Chaucer, Dante, and Jean de Meun* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 29ff. For division in Dante, see Thomas C. Stillinger, *The Song of Troilus: Lyric Authority in the Medieval Book* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992).

division. Gower's fixation with division—dividing the sciences in Book 7, for example—present its own problems in dividing the poem, so that even Genius must apologize for a book-length digression “nought to the matiere / Of love” (7.6-7). If this is measure, it is not the smooth rhythm we may have been expecting, hence the apology is meant for us as much as Amans, nor does the apology or Book 7 serve a clear purpose (at least no one can agree on one).

Like Chaucer, Gower understands language's limitations and inconsistencies, but Chaucer's linguistic perception is readily flagged by his irony, which Gower (at least in his English poem) seems to lack. However, Gower values words as repositories of meaning as powerful as they are unpredictable; they are double-edged, though Gower makes such observations without irony. Double-vision for him is not irony but a riddle or a puzzle, inviting the listener to make meaning from the pieces and to locate the hidden likenesses contained within them. Such double-vision reveals an aspect of language that is arbitrary, and yet the reverse is true, too—arbitrary words, divided and arranged, can mean something. Language is divided, but division makes music possible, be it Jubal's melody, Arion's harp, or Gower's *mesure*. So divided, the province of poetry is shared and carried over to very unlikely places, considering Gower's politics, for he sees poetics—and indirectly poets—in diverse situations. Even in moments of satire and the social critique of the 1381 Rebellion, rebellion is phrased in terms of word play, in which words can be divided and form new words. Gower may call the Rebellion's outcome disorder, but the word play is eerily similar to his own method of fashioning the whole through parts. By equating the rebels' techniques with his poetic *paranomasia* invested in division, Gower seems to harp on the dangers of language, as he does repeatedly in his three major works, which all show a deep concern over language's plasticity even as he exploits it with his poetic skill.

Gower often sounds pessimistic at these times, and his text corroborates this message, for there is no quick fix to social and linguistic ills by adding further division through *divisio textus*. Nevertheless, one can observe that these worries over language do not stop Gower from writing, nor do they bar him from using nuanced language, because ultimately division is redemptive. As Gower writes his way through division, the process leads to discovery, and discovery is worth the price of division. This is not to say that resolution to linguistic or social division is achieved: there are no unearned resolutions in Gower's pages, only more writing, questioning, harmonizing, and dividing, in a back and forth journey that figuratively takes Gower across languages, time, and space. Irony can be an end to itself, but Gower's text may be shooting for something even less resolvable, yet more concerned with how things are than what one's stance should be. Fascinated with the parts of the whole in language, society, and nature, Gower constantly explores how the parts fit together and how they make meaning in and of themselves.

The riddle of division and meaning in Gower's body of work can be crystallized in a little poem by James Merrill:

'b o d y'

Look closely at the letters. Can you see,
entering (stage right), then floating full,
then heading off – so soon –
how like a little kohl-rimmed moon
o plots her course from *b* to *d*

—as *y*, unanswered, knocks at the stage door?
Looked at too long, words fail,
phase out. Ask, now that *body* shines
no longer, by what light you learn these lines and what the *b* and *d* stood for.²²

²² James Merrill, *Collected Poems* (New York: Knopf, 2002).

We might bear this poem in mind when we discuss Gower's body of work and to think of these themes, not of body but "b o d y," which says many words, "body" being only one of them. The discourse of the body is an important field in medieval studies, as the literature abounds in monstrous bodies, gendered bodies, dismembered bodies, textual bodies, and so forth, so tantalizingly unexplained or inexplicable. However, Merrill's poem is something different, not just because of its linguistic dynamics, but because it goes one step beyond word play—or within it, for its play is within the graphic word. The brief titular word becomes not a point of entry only, but the journey in a drama of graphic puns and homophones. Merrill fans out the word, letter by letter, charting the metaphor of a moon's life cycle, and leads us to *y*, standing for *why*, the small syllable that points to vast, unanswered mystery.

It was a delight and surprise for me to read this poem, because I had long ago learned from *Highlights Magazine* the trick of perceiving the waxing and waning of the moon by imagining an ascender above the loop of the lunar phase that spelled either *b* for baby or *d* for dying. From birth to death, the moon's body contains the secret of its phase. Merrill's poem takes that graphic concept and applies it to our own bodies, to anything with b o d y. And just as I learned that phase trick from a children's magazine, it seemed right that the profound question *why* was posed in such an innocent guise, a mere *y*. The poem made the question and the likeness between that body up there and ours down here seem obvious, inevitable. Merrill's graphic riddle is at once child's play and a profound way of seeing anew our oldest questions. His experimentation with Ouija boards makes sense in that context; he reads words not to decipher them but to linger over the occult knowledge within their very forms, as much as such slippery, moon-phased bodies will allow.

So what does "b o d y" have to do with the fourteenth-century poet John Gower? My short answer is that he invests a similar attention to the volumes spoken

by the parts of wholes, and that he invests physicality to language. Eugene Vance in *Mervelous Signs* wrote that Augustine “considered verbal signifiers, *voces*, to be corporeal things, even though what they signify is not corporeal but mental.”²³ Drawing on such a tradition from Augustine and John 1:1, in which the Word is God incarnate—that is, incarnated in a human body but also incarnated as the living Word—Gower, too, gives words to bodies and bodies to words. This play can alienate some modern scholars, who toss aside this linguistic or allegorical husk to get at the politics and history, for Gower is still regarded as a “social poet,” that is, he is more about the social than the poetry, which is seen as regular or monotonous. To many readers, Gower ticks the right metric boxes, yet that mastery of meter, perhaps a strength in his day, becomes yet another nail in his metric coffin. Siân Echard summarized the problem when she wrote that Gower is perceived as a technician rather than a poet.²⁴

The only way to respond to this criticism it is to get into the poetry itself. There has been a recent rise in new formalism, and Gower, whose detail-work can be so easily missed yet vital to uncover for its own sake as well as for complementing other critical methodologies, is especially conducive to this approach. Thus this dissertation depends upon close reading, because Gower’s text can seem opaquely plain, but the little riddles and the “b o d y” are there. Sometimes Gower leaves cues like Merrill’s open invitation, “Look closely”; more often, he draws from a Latinate literary tradition that requires the reader to locate the play based on recognizing a Latin or French technique. Sometimes he seems to fulfill the role of a Ricardian plain poet, using simple words and repeating them, yet Lewis’ and Burrow’s term, “plain,”

²³ Eugene Vance in *Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 36; Dean Swinford, *Through the Daemon’s Gate: Kepler’s Somnium, Medieval Dream Narrative, and the Polysemy of Allegorical Motifs* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 34.

²⁴ Siân Echard, *A Companion to Gower* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 13.

may be misleading at such moments, for the word is quite different the second time around, sometimes as different as *o*'s journey from *b* to *d*, for Gower uses words to evoke other words.²⁵ It is plain poetry in the way Merrill's poem is plain, in probing the riddles of ordinary things, piecing apart words to find new words. We do not need to read contemporary poetry to realize that plain words, like the word 'body,' can yield intense meaning when put under the pressure of a very simple, even childlike, act of looking at the word and what is inside of it. A solid Latinist, Gower worked in the wordplay tradition of Alan of Lille, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, and the Oxford Latin riddle masters, all of whom did not leave a word alone but picked it apart, rearranged syllables, and found words that were not there before. Words, too, change altogether with the addition or omission of a mere letter or two, and Gower's predilection for rhyming such words indicates his obsession with verbal arithmetic in which answers multiply rather than add up.

In his foundational study, R. F. Yeager notes that Gower "thought of words almost as plastic material, to be sized and jointed end-to-end until a line was made and then, accretionally, a poem."²⁶ Those joints Yeager notices are key ingredients to how Gower explores both bodies of language and the world around him. Merrill's poem also usefully overlaps with Gower's interest in the body as something divisible. In this his bodies are unlike the seamless sameness of the pentangle of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. There, it is irrelevant which virtue is lodged in which point, as all five fives apply to the lines of the pentangle equally. Gower's seams between forms, however, are impossible to miss. Lodging a bull's horns into a ram's backside is also—in Gower—an expression of unity, but unlike the pentangle, the zodiac's bodies

²⁵ Burrow, John. *Ricardian Poetry: Chaucer, Gower, Langland, and the 'Gawain' Poet* (London: Penguin, 1971), 30-31.

²⁶ R. F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1990), 61.

retain their discrete entities. This emphasis on odd mixtures is representative of Gower (though often critics see them as stylistic flaws), and part of his project is to yoke diverse forms rather than to seek out geometrical models of elegant, seamless unity. Gower wants the fissures seen.

I use “Writing the Literary Zodiac” as my title for several reasons. Broadly, with it I want to bridge the gap between Gower’s encyclopedic writing and his more “literary” passages. Gower’s praise of Arion is rightly heralded by Yeager and others and is a lodestone for his poetic vision, but that passage itself carries a scientific interest in the measurable qualities of music—it treats music not as entertainment but as science, and as idealized poetics. Repeatedly, Gower’s interest in words finds its counterpart in the things of this world, and ways of knowing the world in turn reflect his poetic perspective. Be it music, medicine, alchemy, rhetoric (the “science of eloquence”), or astronomy, Gower uses scientific topics to investigate poetic principles used in rhyme, wordplay, riddles, synecdoche, and metaphor. Central to Gower’s poetics is his attention to parts and wholes, the way words operate as bodies that can be pieced apart, reassembled, and remade. Of his scientific writing, his astronomical treatise seems to experiment with this theme the most. The zodiac itself is a wheel of stars divided and arranged into constellations. Gower experiments with that cosmic order by offering an unusual description of the stars’ arrangement. His preoccupation rests in the in-between spaces of the constellations, the places where stars belong to the tail of one constellation and the head of the next. It is a description completely in line with his own poetic practice of using the same rhyme word to bridge two lines in a couplet, or to play with head and foot inversion as a metaphor for the inverted social body.

The zodiac, too, abounds with bodies, which fits my key theme of Gower treating words as bodies, yet I hasten to point out that the body, in Gower, does not

have the same valence as it does for modern literary scholars interested in writings on the body primarily for explorations of sexuality and gender, of man versus beast, or of the social body. The body is a central metaphor, aiding discussion of the microcosm and macrocosm and issues of health and perversion. However, key here is Gower's interest not in the body *per se* as a whole entity, but rather Gower's fascination with odd parts—a bull's horns lodged into a ram's backside; a decapitated head made of gold; a pope whose decapitated name is given a "head" to render him "Inclement" Clement. The dissertation explores how Gower thinks through such hyperfocus on pieces. For example, the zodiac abounds with animals, but in this treatise animals are not Gower's concern. What matters is what those bodies, be they bulls, virgins, or lions, all have in common: their division into heads, middles, and feet, and the manner in which constellations share stars, so that a star can be a head *and* a foot. Likewise in Book 1 of the *Vox Clamantis*, Gower writes of rebels as animals that metamorphose into strange beasts. To Gower, the animals as such are less important than the discussion of parts and wholes and the manner in which division allows for ambiguities in the sometimes dual functions of a body's parts. Other issues surrounding the body, such as a body's beastliness or gender, fall into play consequentially yet stem from this fundamental system of parts and wholes. The first book of the *Vox Clamantis* is a tale of seeming chaos, but there is an order to its strange metamorphoses and a sense that what the rebels are doing with their bodies is related to what Gower does as a poet and what stars do overhead. Gower's writing partakes of a kind of literary zodiac in which words and physical things revolve around the same axis of divided parts arranged into wholes.

The chapters investigate those points of contact as moments that reveal Gower's poetics of parts and wholes, and the details that show Gower's attention to structure and the nexus between language and the world. The first two chapters

ground the project in a close reading of Gower's language—individual words and the syllables within them—and spell out the essence of Gower's work: microcosmic, detailed, nuanced, and (this being Gower) abundant. In the first chapter, "Rhyme and Metamorphosis in the *Confessio Amantis*," I explore Gower's attention to rhyme. In the *Confessio*, Gower underscores words nested within words in Russian doll rhymes (e.g., *forbere / bere* from the *Tale of Poliphemus*) and *rime riche*, in which rhyme words appear the same. In these rhymes Gower is experimenting with similarity and difference within words and reading for meaning within verbal forms. With these rhymes, Genius authorizes his sententious speech, Amans rebuts his confessor, physical metamorphoses parallel verbal ones, and individual characters in the tales employ the power of rhyme. Then, turning to Gower's earlier, Latin poetry, Chapter Two, "Decapitation in a Word," makes a very literary reading of a poem generally read through a historicist lens to critique Gower's politics. To read with an eye for his poetics, however, shows a different side of the *Vox*, one saturated with the poetic tradition of wordplay and Latin riddling not acknowledged before. Moreover, the protagonists engaged in this riddling are the rebels of 1381. By equipping them with his poetic tools, Gower in effect casts them as rebel poets. These initial chapters show Gower's investment in words early and late in his career; the parts of words and verbal repetition are significant building blocks aurally and semantically. On a fundamental level, this dissertation is really a spelling out of Gower's couplets and wordplay, exploring his poetic style and revising the view of his role as a man of letters and learning.

In the third chapter, "Golden Measure," I apply this understanding of Gower's wordplay to his praise of Arion and alchemy, which in turn shows his desire for divided bodies (respectively, the social body and base metals) to be reformed and purified into a harmonious society or into unified, exalted gold. As so often, Gower

presents an ideal only to qualify it with nagging concerns. In the Arion passage, Gower presents not a prophesy but a prayer, his longing for Arion's poetic perfection that bridges gaps in the social hierarchy, but there is no assurance that Arion's day will come. With alchemy, Gower lauds the scientific process, so satirized in Chaucer's *Canon's Yeoman's Tale*. This praise makes sense in the context of Gower's struggle with division and the fantasy of a world without multiplicity, but Gower's praise contains a curious qualification, for he notes language's corrupting role in the process of transformation, in which language's transformation over time erodes the knowledge of alchemical transformation. Alchemy's secrets are lost in translation, and Gower's precious Latin learning is suddenly acknowledged as deeply flawed. The metamorphosis of impure to pure and the motley assortment of materials brought to unity are part of Gower's linguistic fantasy, in which pieces coalesce and the body is remade and at one with itself. Gower's division of science and language allows him to explore the possibilities beyond the language he respects and the gap between word and world.

This discussion of alchemy and language relates to the fourth chapter, "Nebuchadnezzar and Bodily Babel," on composite bodies, for which there is no purifying process or chance for Arion's redemptive music. Writing of inverted bodies is an essential part of Gower's poetics, and he applies this perception of mismatched parts to the Statue of Precious Metals from Book 7 of the *Vox Clamantis* and the Prologue of the *Confessio*, as well as in his depiction of the anatomical pantheon man from Book 5. These figures are in effect towers of Babel in human form, constructed from pride but proved fallen through their parts (no alchemical magic is to be found in this transformation of gold into lesser elements). Such idolatrous images stem from humanity's sense of incompleteness and attempt to control division, itself a divisive act. Gower wrestles with what it means to be a composite body medically, with the humors

raging within the body, and he questions what it means to have such a body yet also be created by God.

In the fifth chapter, “Writing the Literary Zodiac,” I turn to astronomy, which, like the chapter on alchemy, takes to task the image of Gower as a lesser man of poetry and of science playing second fiddle to Chaucer. Indeed, as a man of science, Gower falls woefully short of Chaucer’s august reputation. Scholars like J. D. North and Ann W. Astell praise Chaucer’s “Universe of Learning.”²⁷ By contrast, the main book on Gower’s science, from the early twentieth century, contains some important insights on Gower’s sources but informs readers that Gower parroted words without understanding them in his “very limited” capacity.²⁸ My chapters on alchemy and astronomy in particular explore why these sciences would have appealed to Gower’s poetics, for Gower was writing foremost as a poet. In Chapter Six I make the same claim in regards to Gower’s rhetoric, which has been criticized for its ignorance of the rhetorical tradition. This assessment of Gower as a pseudo-learned man dabbling in pseudo-sciences and rhetoric is inadequate because it is solely based on a source-studies approach: if Gower does not correctly cite Albumasar or Cicero or whomever, the argument goes, he shows his ignorance of the subject matter. I would instead like to explore what Gower *does* show an interest in, the combination of parts and the operation of division and harmony, and in my chapter on astronomy, I argue that when Gower writes of natural philosophy and the liberal arts in general, he writes with a richly linguistic poetics in mind, seeing worlds through words. Again, I find Merrill’s poem uncannily apropos, because the intense linguistic focus operates side by side with natural observation: the moon’s body and the word “body” are intertwined. More

²⁷ The phrase is from Ann W. Astell’s book, *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), itself a twist on J. D. North’s book title, *Chaucer’s Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

²⁸ George Fox, *The Mediaeval Sciences in the Works of John Gower* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1931).

than that, it involves our own bodies, and we step in for the moon and write our own riddled existence in a word. In Gower's zodiac, the stars of the constellations are enumerated in such a way that they effectively become couplets. It is a graphic rendering of parts into wholes and stars into words, revealing both cosmic sympathy and a poet's eye for writing the zodiac the writer's way.

The sixth and final chapter, "The Science of Eloquence," explores the *vertu* or power of language for good or evil, abused in riddles as an incestuous play on parts to fabricate false progeny. I begin by exploring rhetoric as a science that links with Book 7's previous treatise on the physical sciences. Gower asserts language's supremacy over nature, but he calls into question the amorality of that power, a concern exemplified by Gower's kings Alphonse and Antiochus, who abuse their subjects through their speech. In the *Mirour* and in Book 8 of the *Confessio*, moreover, riddles are both verbally and physically incestuous; with words one can make something of nothing. It is the Devil's strategy of false fecundity, making pieces proliferate yet relate incestuously to one another; Antiochus likewise peoples his riddle with mothers and fathers but this large phantom family actually describes only two people: his daughter and himself. I conclude in the Epilogue with some thoughts of what these metamorphoses and changes amount to and how they reflect Gower's sense of Poliphemus-like change, in which a person acts and becomes.

One final word: throughout the body chapters, I open with snippets of contemporary poetry, once with James Merrill's "b o d y," and the rest with poems by Richard Wilbur. I have already pointed out the childlike simplicity of "b o d y." Wilbur's pieces, in turn, were published "for children and others" and engage in many of the same linguistic games that Gower plays: words are nested in words in *The Pig in the Spigot* (i.e., *s-pig-ot*); *The Disappearing Alphabet* is an exercise in *apocopa* and the physical and semantic consequences of letters left out of words; *Opposites*, *More*

Opposites, and *A Few Differences* explore abstract structures with concrete examples, resulting in semantic and linguistic hiccups in which the same word can be its own opposite, while traditional opposites are questioned.²⁹ Wilbur's interest in linguistic and physical bodies (his so-called grown-up poetry owes a debt to Robert Frost as well as medieval riddle masters, and his poetry explores natural structures from plants to stars) is very much of a piece with Gower's linguistic play and his predilection for encyclopedic, scientific knowledge. Both poets concern themselves with the way things work on multiple levels, and the nexus between words, stones, and herbs. That some of Wilbur's best—and certainly most playful—poetry is children's poetry, material reserved for the appendix of his collected works, suggests a stretch involved for the grown-ups who may find their expectations defied by such play and such subject matter as the alphabet and word games. Gower's play can similarly be relegated to an obscure field of poetics, but this should not be so. His play constitutes some of his best work, which is reason enough, but it also fits with his view of harmony and division in the world and the play between these forces on heaven and on earth. Poetry at its most playful navigates those same forces with socially restorative potential and the poetic understanding that words belong at the heart of this picture.

²⁹ Richard Wilbur, *Collected Poems: 1943-2004* (New York: Harcourt, 2004), xvi. All quotations from Wilbur are from this edition.

Chapter One

Rhyme and Metamorphosis in Gower's Confessio Amantis

An echo's opposite is the cry
To which the echo makes reply.
Of course I do not mean to claim
That what they say is not the same.
If one of them calls out "Good day"
Or "Who are you?" or "Hip, hooray"
Or "Robert has an ugly hat,"
The other says exactly that.
But still they're opposites. Know why?
A cry is bold; an echo's shy,
And though it loves to shout yoo-hoo,
It won't until it hears from you.
—Richard Wilbur, from "More Opposites"³⁰

Close readings of Gower's poetry are not as common as broader or more thematic assessments, but such attention demonstrates his skill with language, making Gower fit company to stand with Chaucer among England's early makers of poetry. Comparisons of individual tales by Chaucer and Gower have opened useful discussions, but I wish here to compare the poets by exploring a particular formal aspect, that of *rime riche*, in which rhyme partners appear identical but diverge in meaning. Rich rhyme has been receiving attention from scholars in diverse periods and provinces, most notably in Tony Hunt's recent book on Gautier de Coincy, *Miraculous Rhymes*.³¹ Scholars once described almost apologetically a medieval aesthetic using such rhymes, as though it were a phase of mannerism that modern times outgrew; Wimsatt specifically praised Alexander Pope's "resources of piquancy" in contrast to the "easy" rhymes of Middle English and Chaucer.³² However, recent scholarship indicates the increasing awareness of how rich rhymes

³⁰ Richard Wilbur, *Collected Poems*, 536.

³¹ Tony Hunt, *Miraculous Rhymes: The Writing of Gautier de Coinci* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2007).

³² W. K. Wimsatt, "One Relation of Rhyme to Reason: Alexander Pope," *Modern Language Quarterly* 5 (1944), 332. Reprinted in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1954).

are not just ornamental polish on the surface, but purposeful and pointed regions at the heart of the poems that contain them.

Medievalists today are not alone in appreciating rich rhyme, as Marjorie Perloff's recent discussion in *PMLA* of W. B. Yeats attests.³³ Yeats' six-line poem, "A Deep Sworn Vow," completes the *abc* rhyme scheme with a surprise ending:

Others because you did not keep
That deep-sworn vow have been friends of mine;
Yet always when I look death in the face,
When I clamber to the heights of sleep,
Or when I grow excited with wine,
Suddenly I meet your face.

Perloff brilliantly connects the passage's hackneyed expressions ("deep-sworn vow," "look death in the face," "clamber to the heights of sleep," and "excited with wine,"), which all underscore a dull function of recycled language, to the shockingly recycled rhyme of "face" with "face":

The continuity of the "when" clause of lines 3-5 suddenly gives way, the expected rhyme for "face" (place? race? lace? erase?) failing to materialize. Instead of rhyme, repetition: it is "face" itself that returns and sends us back to line 3, suggesting that "your face"—a "face" the lover evidently cannot have—is equivalent to "look[ing] death in the face" in the third, nonrhyming line.³⁴

Instead of semantic ties being opened through rhyme, the scheme closes in and reduces lexical options, but that very act is calculated to speak beyond the stock phrases sprinkled early on. The shock of the paired faces blurs erotic love and death. Not to rhyme constitutes its own broken vow to deliver the *abc* scheme the poet starts with, but the act roots the phrases that seemed clichés and hardens them.

Yeats was employing *rime identique*, a device frowned upon in medieval literature as much as in any other period, because it cheats our readerly expectations. When Joseph Fucilla writes, "the *sonetto identico* seems to be scarcely more than an

³³ Marjorie Perloff, "The Sound of Poetry," *PMLA*, vol. 123 no. 3, May 2008, 751.

³⁴ Marjorie Perloff, "The Sound of Poetry," *PMLA*, vol. 123 no. 3, May 2008, 751.

illegitimate offspring of the *sonetto equivoco*,” his metaphor of illegitimacy hints at a dangerous perversion in repetition: rhyme breeds worthy heirs; repetition spawns bastards.³⁵ We may be reminded by John Fyler’s explication of the story of Lamech, the double husband and double murderer. The double in rhyme, *identique* or *equivoque*, is likewise dangerous art. In *rime equivoque* or *rime riche*, the rhyme words look identical, but they are not. Rich rhyme abounds in medieval French poetry of the most august company including Chrétien de Troyes and Gautier de Coincy. It also abounds in Gower’s French and English poems, with 241 instances in the *Mirour del’Omme* and about 400 instances in the *Confessio Amantis*. Such rhymes reflect sophisticated literary culture, and Hunt has deepened our sense of the sententious, virtuoso, and satirical nature of the device in the hands of Gautier, who positions many of his rich rhymes at the end of miracle tales as a moralizing coda. Rhyme reflects the poet’s brilliant, authoritative voice.

Gower’s rich rhyme becomes even richer when we consider his use of *traducio* in rhyme—soundplay that approaches *rime riche* even if the words are off by one syllable or so (e.g., hiede / wommanhiede). Gower has a tendency to make “easy” rhymes, as defined by Wimsatt and Burrow.³⁶ However, in the context of *rime riche*, it is of a piece with Gower’s whole approach to exploring difference through similarity, in opposites such as *corde* and *descorde*, *weie* and *aweie*. Pieces of words are contained within other words, which then are cemented together in rhyme. I argue for a semantic flavor to many of these couplets.

In this chapter, I look at Gower’s rhyme and argue for its importance in his way of creating meaning through parts and wholes. He draws attention to the joints that hold the couplet by insisting on an echo. He points to the pieces of words, to

³⁵ Joseph Fucilla, “‘Parole Identiche’ in Verse Forms,” *PMLA*, vol. 50., no. 2, June 1935, 402.

³⁶ Wimsatt cites Chaucer’s *Envoy de Chaucer a Scogan*, which rhymes *hed* and *ded*, and *worthynesse*, *wildernessse*, and *kindenesse* (43-49); Burrow, 20-21.

words as things. These words, offered up in the plain style so memorably described by John Burrow as a hallmark of the Ricardian age, reveal that plain diction is profoundly layered with other meanings within its own homonymic register and meanings in the words it brings together. I hope to show that Gower's simple rhymes can be every bit as charged with complexity as Yeats rhyme of *face* and *face*. Indeed, Amans has his own face-to-face moment at the end of the poem, after Cupid removes his dart from Amans' body and Venus commands him, post-surgery, to look upon her mirror:

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 (8.2824-8)

The mirror-reflecting rhyme is at odds with the difference between spirit and flesh, between Amans' ever-optimistic "hertes yhe" and the "yhen dymme" that stare dully back at him. In a simple rhyme at odds with the emotional intensity of the moment, Gower conveys the incredible anguish of being defaced.

Rich rhyme is an elegant, sometimes powerful testament to the change in similarity and the continuity within change: the word itself remains the same on the page, but from one line to its pair, a semantic metamorphosis has opened before us. It is the same magic that I will explore in the ensuing chapters, in Gower's astronomy and alchemy; in his depiction of the body as statue in Daniel's prophetic dream and his dream of bodies of 1381 rebels; of riddle masters tyrannizing subjects and incestuous fathers devouring daughters. This list may seem disparate, but it is no accident that a discussion of rhyme brings out these somatic themes. Incest, prophesy, and riddles in Gower's text reveal his poetic vision as an attention to parts and wholes, division and harmony. A word, like Wilbur's echo, is a paradox, because it is both itself and its opposite, and Gower underscores this play and the odd combinations by which words

and bodies are constructed, causing him to write from an unusual angle. For example, he could have written an account of 1381 and focused on the mob alone, as a unified mass of horror, but he spends most of his *Vox 1* describing individual, unnamed rebels whose bodies themselves are individualized through strange acts of body swaps. We are made to look at lion's tails on asses' bodies, bear paws on bovine bodies. The hybrid fascinates Gower. His *Vox 1* examines the way flesh changes from one beast to another, and he investigates these sites and tries to make a story out of them. What is all the more remarkable about this can be seen by taking into account Caroline Walker Bynum's *Metamorphosis and Identity*.³⁷ There, she differentiates between the hybrid and metamorphosis. Metamorphosis (as in Ovidian transformations) tells a story; hybridity does not. Jupiter transformed Lycaon to the shape that suited his inner nature, whereas a centaur simply is the way he is. These categories of hybridity and metamorphosis are rich in Gower's hands, because the hybrid *does* have a story. This storytelling process, in turn, lends authenticity to the hybrids in question—it gives a voice in unexpected places.

In their repetition, Gower's couplets can resemble hybrids in the sense that they are bodies with mis-matched parts. Like Bynum's hybrid, they seem to be meaningless combinations of parts. However, the semantic undercurrent in these couplets tells a story that resonates with the tales in which Gower places them. Their metamorphoses point the way. *Rime riche* figures in almost every chapter of this dissertation (for *rime riche* seems to occur with telling frequency in all the aforementioned moments in Gower's text), but the point I wish to make in this chapter is the way in which rhyme's doubled voice speaks to explain metamorphosis within the couplet and in the tale as a whole. Listening to the doubled voice, in turn, leads us to listen to other, unexpectedly authoritative voices, from peasants to young women

³⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Metamorphosis and Identity* (New York: Zone Books, 2001).

who confront kings and have the final word: the eloquence is theirs. *Rime riche* may have begun as a sign of authorial power—an ornamental sign of mannerism or at the very least of poetry with Continental sophistication—but in Gower’s English poem the device undergoes a metamorphosis.

Rich Rhyme in the 14th Century

Some introductory remarks on rhyme and *rime riche* in fourteenth-century poetry may be helpful, since few studies in have treated rhyme in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. In 1976 Masayoshi Ito published his groundbreaking study of Gower’s use of rhetorical figures such as *trductio* and *annominatio*, the play of repeated sounds within and at the end of lines.³⁸ Ito showed that Gower particularly exploits *rime riche*, that is, a pair of rhyme words with the same form, which can either be homonyms or the same word with grammatically different forms, such as nouns and verbs. Ito came to this project partly by way noticing that Terence Tiller’s abridged translation of the *Confessio* reduced 88 *rime riche* couplets in the original text to only two. Tiller had remarked that “Gower, even more than Chaucer, employs *rimes riches* that would not be acceptable in modern English.”³⁹ With a thorough quantitative study, Ito corroborated Tiller’s impression, noting that Gower uses *rime riche* three times more than Chaucer does—his 383 in the *Confessio Amantis* as opposed to Chaucer’s 111.⁴⁰ It is a striking difference in poetic style that had not been noted

³⁸ Masayoshi Ito, *John Gower, The Medieval Poet* (Tokyo: Shinozaki Shorin, 1976). For a discussion of *trductio* and *annominatio*, see Helge Kökeritz, “Rhetorical Word-Play in Chaucer,” *PMLA* 69, no. 4 (1954 Sept), 937-952; Paull F. Baum, “Chaucer’s Puns,” *PMLA* 71, no. 1 (Mar., 1956), 225-246.

³⁹ Ito, 214.

⁴⁰ Ito, 215. He notes that Chaucer has another 81 cases of split *rimes riches*, pairings separated by one or more lines, such as might be found in rime royal stanzas, for example, but does not otherwise cover such rhymes in his study beyond remarking that Gower’s *Mirour* contains “a good many” as well. He notes that even if Chaucer’s 81 cases are included, the frequency of *rime riche* in his verse is still only 0.54% as opposed to 1.1% (about once every 100 lines) in the *Confessio*.

before, possibly because Chaucer's *rime riche* can seem more prominent to modern readers for the craft and playfulness of his broken rich rhymes, such as *merciable* and *merci able* (An ABC 182-184); '*Chek her!*' and *chekker* (BD 659-60); *woundid* and *wound hid* (Intr MLT 102-3); *a tene is* and *Athenys* (HF 387); and even *Morpheus* and *moo feës thus* (BD 265-6).⁴¹ In comparison to Chaucer's virtuosity, Gower's straightforward *rime riche* couplets may seem simplistic or even "inferior."⁴²

By carefully tallying and categorizing Gower's *rime riche* according to semantic and grammatical cases, Ito sought to legitimize such rhymes as an ornamental poetic device valued during the medieval period if not today. Ito intended to pay tribute to Gower's skill, yet his conclusions largely coincide with Wimsatt's assessment of easy rhymes as pairings lacking thematic significance. Ito noted that Gower's practice evinced a dependence on "the medieval 'Mannerism,'" which at best served Gower's didactic style with sonorous grace and at worst employed "an easy and monotonous technique" lacking Chaucer's sophistication.⁴³ Gower's poetry, then, by Ito's assessment and by Wimsatt's logic, might seem to exemplify the medieval poet's dependence upon easy rhymes, for in addition to *rime riche*, the *Confessio* contains a particularly high concentration of words with similar roots joined together, words that could be termed *rime riche* variants for their shared rhymes that underscore shared words within the rhymes—*wommanhiede* and *maidenhiede*; *recorde* and *discorde*; *goode* and *ungoode*. Such pairings relate to the sound play in Chaucer's *worthynesse* and *wildernessse*, though Chaucer's rhyme makes no play on a shared word tucked in like a Russian doll (*hiede* is a word, but *-nesse* is not). Gower shows a predilection for look-alike or almost look-alike rhymes, the opposite of the diverse

⁴¹ See discussion in Michio Masui, *The Structure of Chaucer's Rime Words* (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1964), 286, 260-261. See also Kökeritz, 946-9; Max Kaluza, *Chaucer und der Rosenroman: Eine Litterargeschichtliche Studie* (Berlin: Verlag von Emil Felber, 1893).

⁴² Ito, 228.

⁴³ Ito, 228.

couplings that Wimsatt privileges in his essay.

But Gower's tendency is not to use these rhymes for purposes of "ease" nor exclusively for ornament's sake, but rather to generate abundant and productive tensions between the material form of language and the ethical or narrative points of his work. The sameness in the rhyme plays off of the difference in the meanings. Thus Gower makes great demands upon such rhymes, though perhaps not in ways Wimsatt might expect. His *rime riche* always had the possibility of being semantically charged and often was. There is an aptness to the position of many of Gower's *rime riche* couplets—for example, all the "drinke" and "drunke" *rime riche* couplets occur within the book on gluttony, the repetitious rhyme words underscoring the drunkenness that results from repeated drinking. But there are more subtle, even profound, uses of Gower's *rime riche* couplets and *rime riche* variants, for Gower's approach to rhyme, like his approach to Latin poetry, follows the precept that words carry a certain force—not in equal measure in every couplet, but power dependent upon the couplet's sense and the poem's context. This force, combined with the ease of rhyming in Middle English, allowed for a great range of combinations and play between similar sound and divergent sense. Wimsatt suggests that Middle English's ease of rhyme made for looser rhymes, depriving the poet of a challenge, but Gower tackles a different challenge in the play between form and content, the striking differences in and connections between words that look similar or even the same.

Part of that play between form and content manifests itself in paronomasia. In her essay "Rhyme Puns" Debra Fried states that rhyme and pun are twins, both forging connections based upon sound rather than sense.⁴⁴ *Rime riche* and *rime riche* variants, with their mirrored rhyme words, seem even more open to punning, for their very presence unfolds and conflates different meanings in words that only *appear* similar or

⁴⁴ Debra Fried, "Rhyme Puns" in Jonathan Culler, *On Puns* (New York: Blackwell, 1988), 83.

the same. Readers like Christopher Ricks and Alexandra Hennessey Olsen have noticed this playful, punning duality to Gower's *rime riche*.⁴⁵ Appreciating their potential as tools of social criticism, R. F. Yeager notes that these twin rhyme words employ a "double talk."⁴⁶ It is a felicitous description, for *rime riche* presents twins to the eye, but the sense tells a different tale. Gower speaks negatively of two-tongued vice and law's "double face," yet *rime riche* also thrives on duality, a unified appearance with diverse nuances (130). As such it draws our attention to dualities in language and in human behavior.

Throughout this chapter I will discuss *rime riche*'s knack for wordplay, not just to appreciate the play but to explore how play becomes possible—that is, by letting rhyme's shared form draw our attention to more complex content than initially perceived. Rhyme sets up a relationship between two different words based on sound, yet to juxtapose these words is to jumble their meanings, to allow sound to guide us toward sense. This seems Gower's intention. For him, the couplets make meaning by a sense of logic in rhyme, as though the rhyme words are a key to the poem's meaning. This approach to rhyme is radically different from the more modern perception of what rhyme should and should not do. Fried comments that we have inherited the eighteenth-century notion that rhyme is the servant, never the master, of sense.⁴⁷ Her assessment echoes Robert Graves' personification of rhyme as prosodic waiters:

Rhymes properly used are the good servants whose presence at the dinner-table gives the guests a sense of opulent security; never awkward or over-clever, they hand the dishes silently and professionally. You can trust them not to interrupt the conversation or allow their personal disagreements to come to the

⁴⁵ Christopher Ricks, "Metamorphosis in Other Words" in A. J. Minnis, *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments*. See Ricks' discussion of *rime riche* on pages 29-30 and 37. Alexandra Hennessey Olsen, "*Betwene Ernest and Game*": *The Literary Artistry of the Confessio Amantis* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990).

⁴⁶ R. F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic*, 43. Yeager discusses *rime riche* on pages 34-44.

⁴⁷ Fried, "Rhyme Puns," 84.

notice of the guests; but some of them are getting very old for their work.⁴⁸ A good rhyme, in this sense, is a thing of background ambiance, though perhaps occasionally singled out and appreciated like a fine crystal goblet, a perfect container for the sense of the couplet.

Gower, however, gives his rhyme mastery by taking seriously that difference between form and content. The words draw attention to themselves and create a sub-text that often carries into the tales and even into the entire poem. He is sensitive to the tension between the rhyme word and its mate; they could be in opposition to one another in sense, yet in sound, they are one. Though rhyme words are brought together arbitrarily (only by rhyme), their sound play creates an air of inevitability, instilling a logic of their own that casts its weight on the story, resonating with and commenting on the tales. Part of the playfulness depends upon the way Gower's rhymes often link abstract concepts with a more physically-oriented word, as in this example from the tale of Pyramus and Thisbe:

So as fortune scholde falle,
For feere and let hire wympel falle (3.1395-6)

Yoked together by the same rhyme word, these two parallel actions, one abstract, one physical, coalesce. It is an unexpected combination, reminiscent of zeugma's often quirky pairings of expressions that, taken singly, barely merit a second thought. Zeugma functions through syllepsis (e.g., he ate his heart out and his take-out); through its repeated rhyme word, *rime riche* similarly yokes two words or phrases that would have been kept separated: Thisbe's fortune and her wimple fall. The togetherness of the falling objects suggests their connectedness, their causality. This combination is Gower's addition to the story; Ovid shows Thisbe dropping her garment but does not linger upon the chance moment. The center of his story is

⁴⁸ See the discussion of this passage in Clive Scott, *The Riches of Rhyme* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988), 6.

Pyramus' blood, shed for Thisbe and coloring the white mulberries red. In contrast, Gower's reading centers the tale around Thisbe, for Fortune would not have fallen if her wimple had not.

The couplet is but one example of Gower's cinematography, his putting an unexpected weight on a quiet moment and a simple object as central to the story's tragic turn of events. It is well known that Gower is a visual poet, attested in such passages as the dressing of the loathly lady (1.1743-1756) and the baby bathing in Canacee's blood (3.312-320).⁴⁹ Moreover, there is evidence that Gower also deliberated over the visual dynamic of his manuscript's layout, glosses, Latin headers, and illuminations.⁵⁰ This deliberation over appearance points to Gower's interest in the visual as a mode of understanding, arranging, and explaining. In Gower, tragedy and metamorphosis do not just happen; tiny hints preface great change, and in Pyramus and Thisbe's case, the rhyme words serve as those clues, alerting us to the precise moment of the lovers' downfall with the fall of a simple garment. Rhyme helps us to *see* the abstract. Itself visually striking on the page as well as depicting a vivid moment in the story, the *rime riche* couplet aids the visual project of Gower's poem.

This type of abstract and physical pairing occurs not just in *rime riche* couplets but in *rime riche* variants as well, as in this example:

And thurgh Envie also it fell

⁴⁹ For the loathly lady, see Russell Peck, "Folklore and Powerful Women in Gower's 'Tale of Florent'," in *The English 'Loathly Lady' Tales: Boundaries, Traditions, Motifs*, ed. S. Elizabeth Passmore and Susan Carter (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications 2007), 100-45. For Canacee, see Maura Nolan, "Lydgate's Literary History: Chaucer, Gower, and Canacee," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 27 (2005), 59-92.

⁵⁰ One example of Gower's involvement is his choice to make the illustration of Nebuchadnezzar's Statue of Precious Metals the main illustration for his illustration program. As Derek Pearsall says, this decision is "an idiosyncratic choice of illustration and most probably reflects Gower's own priorities and his desire to insist, through the illustration, upon the general theme of his Prologue." Gower's Latin glosses and headers, in turn, allow his text to emulate prestigious Latin manuscripts. Pearsall, "The Manuscripts and Illustrations of Gower's Works," *A Companion to Gower*, edited by Siân Echard (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 88, 90.

Of thilke false Achitofell . . . (2.3089-90)

On the surface, Genius is merely using some narrative filler to say what happened to Ahithophel. However, to say what *befell* Ahithophel brings out the shared root “fell” in both words. He is a fell villain, betraying David to serve as Absalom’s councilor, and his downfall is metaphorical and literal, for once Absalom rejects his counsel, Ahithophel hangs himself. Genius tells Ahithophel’s story in miniature, a mere six lines following the two couplets on Joab, but he crafts this one couplet to crystallize the man’s core and moralize upon his fallen nature. *Rime riche* variants will figure strongly in this chapter, especially in the following section on Constance and the rhyme word *schipe*; like *rime riche*, the *rime riche* variants are pairings that capture in a nutshell the essence of a scene, a man, or a story. As such they exemplify Gower’s attitude toward rhyme as something that holds a great amount in a tiny space and complexity nested in a simple form.

Gower encourages connections made with rhyme, and interestingly, at times his characters also seem aware of this potent subtext, and in the middle two sections of my chapter I will explore *rime riche* as a rhetorical tool in direct discourse and dialogue. Like a number of characters in the tales, Genius and Amans use *rime riche* consciously to tap into its metamorphic, persuasive power. Genius delivers the bulk of the couplets, often to moralize and steer Amans. Amans, in turn, uses *rime riche* couplets as counter measures and ways to assert his own desires. Amans’ impressive *rime riche* couplet cluster in Book 5 has been noted by other readers, but this chapter offers an interpretative edge to that rhetoric and suggests a new reading of the relationship between Genius and Amans. Amans is not merely using verbal ornament but engaging in a sophisticated couplet war with his artful confessor. Perhaps the change in Book 8 from lover to poet is not a complete surprise, insofar as we are subtly prepared by Amans’ verbal awareness, his knack for rhyming with Genius tit

for tat.

Gower, then, yokes words together in meaningful yet unforeseen ways, describing change in his characters and their lives and in turn changing our way of reading the words and the tales. These pairings are particularly suggestive in the *Confessio Amantis*, since it is a poem about metamorphoses, and the nexus between *rime riche* and metamorphosis will be treated in the final section of this essay. Partly from context, partly from the conspicuous quality of pairing similar words, Gower's rhymes often seem to carry a metamorphic force, or a logic that precedes metamorphosis--diagnosing it, explaining it, mimicking it, instigating it. The couplets are a sub-text, an avenue to understanding why certain metamorphoses and turns of events happen the way they do. The friction between form and content in *rime riche* and *rime riche* variants functions much like metamorphosis. Rhyme is inherently a punning, metamorphic process in the microcosmic couplet and the in the larger context of the poem. In *rime riche*, two identical looking words are suggestively juxtaposed, and the act of bridging the two semantically creates linguistic metamorphosis—a quibbling over nuances and shades of meaning until meanings converge, a causal semantic push bringing transformation. As I hope to show in this essay, Gower's rhyme words bear this metamorphic force. They clue us in to the essence of a story by revealing the fluidity of material forms parallel to or causally linked to shifting linguistic meanings. The authoritative heft of language, so sought after by Genius and Amans, and controlled or obeyed by others, comes into question at this point, for why should Callisto be changed into a bear, just because Jupiter could not *forbear* her? Though trusting of language and devoted to form, Gower seems aware that literary craft sometimes aestheticizes disharmony, rather than forges the age of peace that Arion's art, so lionized by Gower, is supposed to do.

This chapter explores one aspect of Gower as a craftsman who *builds* poetry.

The three great poems of his corpus, his *Speculum Meditantis* (*Mirour de l'Omme*), *Vox Clamantis*, and *Confessio Amantis* reflect the consciously architectural aspect of his work. He crafts a balanced achievement in the three languages of his day and systematizes and authenticates these works with Latin titles. His adherence to formal structure imbues every project from the macro to micro. The *Mirour* and *Confessio* are largely structured around the seven deadly sins, the *Vox* by the social estates. The *Confessio* is further buttressed with Latin headers and glosses, which transform an English text into a manuscript that looks almost classical. At the level of the line, the *Vox* is painstakingly constructed by *cento*, an elaborate technique of grafting the words of other poems and making the words of other authors the poet's own voice; thus Ovid's words gain new resonances in Gower's poem. *Rime riche* is another game of repetition with difference and of building architectural structure at the level of the line.

This devotion to structure is why reading for form is important for reading Gower. There is more to be done to understand Gower's need for form and the tension between building a strong structure for authenticity, and yet generating a subtext that works around, even against, that structure. For example, although Gower's Latin glosses are ostensibly there to lend authenticity to his English text, the glosses often fall flat while commenting on the vernacular's tales. Similarly, Book 1 of the *Vox* deplores the 1381 Rebellion as the end of order, yet Gower focuses less on historical events and more on a rebellious hybridity of men and animals, a rearrangement of parts that results in a powerful social inversion. The hybrids in the *Vox* find a sort of gentler cousin in the *Confessio*'s redoubled rhyme, not hybrids *per se* but twins made to be taken together. In the *Confessio*, Gower's claim to write with "rude wordis and with pleyne," uses the modesty topos to project a seamlessness to his language, a simplicity and elegance to structure that is open to the eye and the understanding (8.3122). *Rime riche* both supports and undercuts that orderly claim,

for the similar words paired together in fact present highly nuanced and semantically complex arrangements. As Ronald Levao put it in describing the paradoxical striving for form in *Paradise Lost*, “hierarchy jostles with egalitarianism, symmetry with asymmetry, precision with imprecision, and promises of formal completion with discoveries of incompleteness.”⁵¹ That aspect of symmetrical, formal completion nonetheless conveys burgeoning content that triggers reciprocal creation between form and content.⁵² Form informs content, and *vice versa*, and complex connectedness yields both symmetry and asymmetry, and sometimes even a sense of incompleteness—of questions asked rather than answered. The yoked words may appear identical, and the act of joining them simple, but forging the bridge between such words leads Gower to many unexpected places.

Metamorphosis of a Word: From *Schipe* to *Worschipe*

Because they border on an ordinary rhyme (if there is such a thing) and *rime riche*, the *rime riche* variants are a useful place to argue for the meaning behind Wimsatt’s “easy” rhymes. Ito first drew readers’ attention to Gower’s *rime riche* couplets, but he left out many borderline cases, *rime riche* variants which he labeled “quasi” *rime riche*, such as the words “otherwise” and “wise” (5.87-8; Ito, 225). The boundary between broken *rime riche* and quasi *rime riche* can be a hazy matter of opinion. A few couplets contain a space between the words “other” and “wise” (e.g., 5.1873-4; 6.77-78; 7.4379-80) and others do not (4.2580; 4.2660; 6.1145; 7.651-2; 7.1614-1615; 7.2435-6; 8.3085v). Though Ito does not count rhymes like *otherwise* /

⁵¹ Ronald Levao, “‘Among Unequals What Society’: *Paradise Lost* and the Forms of Intimacy,” *Modern Language Quarterly*, 61:1, University of Washington, March 2000, 82.

⁵² For a discussion of the reciprocal creation between Adam and Eve, which I here adapt to describe the pairing of words in *rime riche*, see Levao, 90.

wise, *worldesriche / riche*, and *Goddeshalf / half*, it seems to be a matter of chance, scribal or otherwise, that spaced them as such, and the *rime riche* is still very much in play.⁵³ Nor does Ito's tally include the numerous cases of such broken *rime riche* couplets as *aweie / a weie*, *befalle / be falle*, *afyr / a fyr*.

Charles Owen cast the net wider than Ito and studies what he calls identicals, or rhyme words that share identical rhyming syllables.⁵⁴ Ito's quasi *rime riche* couplets could be included here, but the definition extends to many more cases, such as "tofore" and "therfore," "charge" and "descharge," "also" and "so." Owen also argues for the significance of "near identicals," words that do not share a final identical syllable, as in *-fore*, *-charge*, and *-so*, just mentioned, yet the rhyme pair contains a word in a word, such as "this" and "is"; "ale" and "tale"; "throwe" and "rowe." These identicals and near identicals are less striking than pure *rime riche*, yet their placement in the text often draws attention to the *rime riche* and *rime riche* variants immediately at hand in a dense cluster of eye and sound play. Owen quotes the variant, first-recension text from Book 8.3085*-3108*, twenty-four lines of straight *rime riche*, identicals, and near identicals:

But where a man schal love crave
 And faile, it stant al otherwise.
 In his proverbe seith the wise,
 Whan game is best, is best to leve:
 And thus forthi my fynal leve,
 With oute making eny more,
 I take now for evere more
 Of love and of his dedly hele,

⁵³ Is also a matter of which edition consulted. For the *worldes riche / riche* couplet (5.87-88), Peck spaces the words "worldes" and "riche" apart, representing the couplet as pure *rime riche*. Macaulay counts "worldesriche" as one word, as do Ito and J. D. Pickles and J. L. Dawson in *A Concordance to John Gower's "Confessio Amantis,"* (Wolfboro, NH: D.S. Brewer, 1987). Yet Macaulay and Pickles and Dawson space *worldes good / good* as *rime riche* (2.3481-2). They also consider "half" and "goddeshalf" not *rime riche* in one instance (5.4451-2) yet *rime riche* in another (*half / Goddes half*, 5.5015-5016). I consider both types clear cases of *rime riche*. Indeed, Kökeritz includes similar examples of *rime riche* in his discussion of French poetry, 944.

⁵⁴ Charles A. Owen, Jr., "Notes on Gower's Prosody" in *The Chaucer Review: A Journal of Medieval Studies and Literary Criticism* 28, no. 4 (1994): 408.

Which no phisicien can hele.
 For his nature is so divers,
 That it hath ever some travers
 Or of to moche or of to lite,
 That fully mai noman delyte,
 But if him lacke or that or this.
 But thilke love which that is
 Withinne a mannes herte affermed,
 And stant of charite confermed,
 That love is of no repentaile;
 For it ne berth no contretaile,
 Which mai the conscience charge,
 But it is rather of discharge,
 And meedful heer and overal.
 Forthi this love in special
 Is good for every man to holde,
 And who that resoun wol beholde,
 Al other lust is good to daunte . . .

A reader considering only *rime riche* couplets would notice three *rime riche* couplets but miss the extensive number and range of *rime riche* variants flanking them.

Owen's observations here are especially valuable because many readers have cited Amans' *rime riche* cluster in Book 5.79ff. as the most elaborate one in the poem, a reputation it deserves for its six consecutive *rime riche* couplets (including the "quasi" *riche / worldesriche*), but if we take into account broken *rime riche*, identicals, and near identicals buttressing *rime riche* couplets throughout the *Confessio*, we see a greater abundance of visually and aurally conspicuous *rime riche* clusters. The many hundreds of *rime riche* couplets, identicals, and near identicals scattered in clusters or individually throughout the poem underscore how heavily Gower emphasizes the last words in his lines.⁵⁵

Owen's study demonstrates that Gower purposely crafts his couplets with this visual and aural play. The identicals and near identicals look and sound similar to

⁵⁵ I did not count them, but my impression that there are many more identicals (or *rime riche* variants, as I call them) than *rime riche* couplets is based partly on the numerous cases in which the *rime riche* variants are more abundant than the *rime riche* couplets with the same root word. For example, throwe (2 *rime riche* couplets), throwe / overthrowe (18 couplets); falle (5), falle / befall (18); tyde (1), tyde / betyde (7); stonde (0), stonde / understonde (39); fell (1), fell/befell (9).

rime riche couplets, and I argue that they act like them, too. That is, there is often a semantic weight to them, the same force that reflects and reshapes the content in which the couplet is positioned. I should add that in my study of Gower's *rime riche* variants does not address the identicals and near identicals as broadly as Owen does. His general study explores all couplet rhymes with a shared syllable. I focus on these categories only insofar as one rhyme word is contained within its partner. Thus a couplet rhyme like *affermed-confermed* is valuable for reinforcing the sound play in the cluster quoted above, but I am more interested in the sound and sense play in a rhyme like *herte-scherte*, as in the tale of Hercules, Deianira, and Nessus:

He [Nessus] tok to Deianyre his scherte,
Which with the blod was of his herte
Thurghout desteigned overal . . . (2.2243-2245)

Just the word *scherte* contains the word *herte*, so Nessus' *scherte* contains the blood of his villainous *herte*—fatal poison to Hercules. This word *scherte* is like a Russian doll containing another doll inside, rendering Nessus' gift duplicitous and sinisterly layered. Hercules and Deianira later become ensnared by these layers to the extent that Deianira unwittingly kills Hercules. In a couplet using the same rhyme words, Deianira's *herte*, desperate because Hercules' love for her has cooled and fallen upon another woman, drives her to remember the *scherte* (2279-80). The repeated rhyme signifies an act of recall; she remembers that there is a way to win back her lover, for Nessus had told her that covering Hercules in Nessus' garment would rekindle Hercules' love for her. (If this were opera, we would be hearing the foreboding Nessus-leitmotif with these *herte / scherte* rhyme words.) The shared rhyme underscores the connection between Deianira's heart, poisoned with jealousy and loneliness, and Nessus' heart, which *is* poison. Nessus originally looks upon Hercules and Deianira with lustful envy in his "loke" or locked heart (2173); Deianira in turn is "afyr" in eagerness to preserve the shirt of her would-be rapist and cannot rest at ease

until the precious shirt is in “hire cofre loke” (2256-7). Both characters are marked by desire and secrecy. She conceals from Hercules the shirt’s perceived power as a charm, just as Nessus conceals its true power as fatal poison to the wearer. Thus another correspondence emerges: to Nessus and Deianira, the shirt is a layered gift and not just the shirt it seems, but something able to change the wearer—only they both keep that knowledge and their double “entente” under wraps (2192, 2247). The Russian doll rhyming, hiding a *herte* in a *sherte*, lends itself to these themes of covering and concealing, and from these machinations Hercules is not just smothered in this secrecy but “sette afyre” from the poisoned passions of others (2292).

This small example shows how a word within a word forces a correspondence between the rhyme words, which in turn forms connections in the story and a way of reading the story. Although Gower does not employ Wimsatt’s specific example of a prosy rhyme, *worthyness / wilderness / kindenesse*, he does use a similar rhyme, *worschipe / kindeschipe*. There are numerous variations of these rhymes that end with the word *schipe*, many of which demonstrate that a Middle English poet can “make great demand” semantically upon such easy rhymes. This couplet from the tale of Constance shows us what *annominatio* can do when Gower puts his mind to it:

Out of the Schip with gret worschipe
Thei toke hire into felaschipe. . . (2.741-2)

Taken alone, the words “worschipe” and “felaschipe” are a neutral pair, but the immediate nautical context makes the rhyme ingenious. The rescuers have found Constance in the boat, but in case the tale’s context would not be enough, the triple sound play ensures that we do not miss the “schip” in “worschipe” and “felaschipe.” The couplet forms a logical whole that encapsulates the story in wordplay. Hated by her envious mother-in-law to be, who duplicitously calls her “So worschiful a wife” while secretly plotting her destruction, Constance was cast off by this woman in “A

naked schip withoute stiere” (2.662, 2.709). She was in a sense stripped from *worship* to *ship*. However, this sign of Constance’s naked vulnerability and isolation gives way when the word seems to give way and reverse itself. Linguistic change parallels the tale’s action and returns the word *worschipe* that was wrongfully taken from Constance: people crowd around the ship and, as though adding a prefix, add their respectful sympathy (*worschipe*) and support (*felaschipe*). These two lines capture a moment of transformation in the word “schip” but also in Constance’s tale: bondage gives way to release, isolation to community, shame to honor.

Besides its metamorphic flavor, this example achieves its linguistic tension by pairing an abstract idea—Constance’s worthiness for “worschipe” and “felaschipe”—with a tactile counterpart, Constance climbing out of the boat. Though the couplet achieves its tension through opposition, the word “schip” remains the key word to the action within the couplet and indeed to Constance’s tale of constancy. She earns her worship by her endurance at sea, and the fellowship is literally that, fellows gathered around the ship. Thus her adversities and isolation yield respect and community. Gower reinforces this sub-text later in the story with two couplets back to back, heavy with this nautical imagery, in which her would-be rapist seeks to undo her:

Unknowe what hire schal betide;
 And fell so that be nyhtes tide
 This knyht withoute felaschipe
 Hath take a bot and cam to schipe (2.1107-1108)

“Tide” refers to time here, but due to its context, the sea’s tides are also signified. It is as though Gower is keeping the nautical imagery from one couplet to the next. He also complements the *schipe* rhymes with nautical pairs like *seil / conseil* in the tale of Jason and Medea (5.3901-3904) and *saile / assaile* in the tale of Neptune (5.985-986; 991-992). In the quotation above, it would seem that no matter what the tide puts Constance through, ultimately good “betides” her, and she prevails over her isolation,

just as *fellowship* prevails over *ship*. One could say “schipe” is the root word for Constance’s story: the word that was called forth to unmake her has made her.

These are just samples of Gower’s 42 *rime riche* variants on “schipe.” The suffix “-ship” is similar to the “-hood” in womanhood and other status-identifying names, but it carries a flavor of motion and transition (though in Constance’s case, her ship was meant to be her coffin, not a vehicle for finding a new life). It could be argued that such rhymes automatically and artlessly occur where boats are a part of the narrative, but Gower’s word choice consciously makes the connection between the physical and the abstract in many of his *schipe* rhymes. For example, when Theseus abandons Ariadne and takes ship because of his *unkindeschipe*, unmindful of her *goodschipe* (5.5423-4), Gower passes over words like “unkindenesse” and “goodnesse” (he uses such rhyme words in 5.5142, 5.5222, 7.2097, and P. 486) because he wants that nautical resonance, the implication that a man with *unkindeschipe* will forgo fellowship and *goodshipe* alike. In this couplet, the word “ship” is not present, but we hardly miss it with these compounds in a narrative in which Theseus sets sail and Ariadne sleeps in ignorance on a sandy beach.

Not all the couplets have the same rich play. Indeed, many of them have nothing to do with ships. But the majority of these *schipe* rhymes have suggestive connections adding nuances to the lines or overt references that give readers a new take on old tales. For example, as readers we already know Noah’s story, and Gower does not retell it beyond saying in passing that Noah’s “felaschipe . . . only weren saulf be schipe,” yet this pairing offers a subtle spin on the tale, especially in the Prologue’s apocalyptic context of social and spiritual division (Prol. 1015-1016). It is as though salvation from the devastating flood and the threat of division lies in the word “felaschipe” itself—sticking together in the protective ark, an emblem of community and faith. The Greeks, in turn, embark on voyages as a “felaschipe”

(1.1163-4); they work on board together as a matter of course—by definition, what else would a *fellow-ship* do, if not take ship with one's fellows?

The implied honor and community in the word *felaschipe* branches out to other “schipe” words as well. Genius uses such language to argue that crusading is a means to achieve society's respect. With his punning rhymes he gives the concept a sententious spin as he tells Amans how a valiant man should act:

So that be londe and ek be Schipe
He mot travaile for worschipe
And make manye hastyf rodes,
Sometime in Prus, sometime in Rodes (4.1627-30)

Genius clusters together a *rime riche* variant with a *rime riche* couplet for added weight; in case Amans missed the first one, the second couplet should grab his attention. As Genius states earlier, Idleness “thinkth worschipe to deserve”, even though he will not serve a lord (1097). Idleness wants *worship* without the *ship*, but this is impossible linguistically and practically. A hero must “travaile”; he makes roads, even in “Rodes” itself. The clever rhymes round out the parallelism of the couplets (*be londe, be Schipe; Sometime in Prus, sometime in Rodes*) and convey a sense of logical inevitability.

To understand Genius' persuasive tactics, it is worth considering Genius' *rime riche* repertoire and the colloquial nature of these couplets. More *rime riche* couplets occur in the conversations between Genius and Amans rather than in the tales themselves. (Exact figures, however, are subjective because Genius' moralizing and tale-telling blur too much; it is often impossible to pinpoint when Genius' introductory matter ends, when a tale exactly begins, and when Genius' wrap-up matter follows a concluded tale.) Despite this concentration of *rime riche* couplets in the dialogues between Genius and Amans, Ito argues that the *rime riche* couplets are easily missed because of their colloquial nature; many of them are made through a “meaningless

and, in a way, useless phrase or clause.”⁵⁶ For example, Ito points out that nearly every *rime riche* couplet with “wise” contains a colloquial phrase: “in the case of ‘*wise: wise*’ one fellow unexceptionally forms part of the idiomatic phrase “in — wise.”⁵⁷ He is largely correct; out of 34 *wise / wise* couplets, one *wyse / wyse*, and two *wise / wyse*, only three couplets do not contain this phrasing. Eleven contain the phrase “in such a wise,” eight contain “in this wise,” four contain “in sondri wise,” and there are eleven other similar “in — wise” phrases. The rhymes appear even more formulaic if we add what such phrases rhyme with: eight instances of “wordes wise”, five times “philosophers wise” or “wyse,” and nine instances of the verb “to be” coupled with “wise.”

Despite such conventionality, the discourse in pairing nearly identical words remains artful, sententious, and weighted with meaning. Even the colloquial “wise” couplets carry a force of their own and allude to a tension between the way people act and the wisdom or folly therein. It is significant, for example, that the *Tale of Three Questions*, a tale about a king’s pursuit of wisdom, contains three *wise / wise* couplets. The tale emphasizes the king’s obsession for wisdom in the very first line, and the ensuing *rime riche* couplet serves to underscore the irony of his efforts:

A king whilom was yong and wys,
 The which sette of his wit gret pris.
 Of depe ymaginaciouns,
 And strange interpretaciouns,
 Problems and demandes eke,
 His wisdom was to finde and seke;
 Wherof he wolde in sondri wise
 Opposen hem that weren wise. (1.3067-3074)

Genius begins his tale with a matter-of-fact statement that the king is wise, but the next half dozen lines bring this assertion into question. The king has too much pride

⁵⁶ Ito, 219.

⁵⁷ Ito, 218.

in his cleverness, his deep ruminations, and puzzle-solving skills. The repetition of the word “wise” (“wise” or “wys” three times, “wit” once, “wisdom” once) clues us in to the king’s excessive obsession. Moreover, the *rime riche* couplet unmasks him. In his pursuit to champion his wit, he “Opposen him that weren wise.” The line sets him in opposition to the wise people he gathers at his court, which makes him seem more predatory than wise, not to mention that he a show-off who cares not about wisdom but about seeming wise before others. Moreover, he operates “in sondri wise” by using his problem-solving tricks and analytical skills. Here, the word “wise” refers to his methods, his tactics of domination, not to the true wisdom that Peronelle will show in the next two *wise / wise* couplets, which feminize her wisdom:

Arraied in hire beste wise
 This maiden with her wordes wise
 Hire fader ladde be the hond . . . (1.3223-3225)

And sche the king with wordes wise
 Knelende thonketh in this wise . . . (1.3345-3346)

From these couplets one would never guess that she is an unparalleled riddle master, for they focus on her intercessory role as Petro’s daughter. Peronelle’s “wordes wise” do not describe her cleverness in a battle of wits but her courtesy and decorum. In the first instance she presumably comforts her father while leading him to court, where his life is in peril; in the second she thanks her king for his offer to give her financial prosperity. The couplets make her seem meek, but that posture for a woman is wise, and she uses it to her advantage. The attention to Peronelle’s dress, her “beste wise,” points to her feminine strategy in managing the king, not unlike the biblical Esther who dresses herself exquisitely before approaching her lord without his invitation—there, too, on a mission to save her people from a king’s arbitrary orders. Wisely arrayed with feminine dress and kneeling posture, Peronelle uses humility as a mask to

save her father and be an agent in her own exchange between men.⁵⁸

Thus, just as she gently leads her father by the hand, so she leads the king. Kneeling submissively, she humbly asks for her father's advancement "in this wise," a phrase referring to the manner of her speech, for there is wisdom in her delivery and calculation in her words. She will become the queen, the king's equal, by trapping him with his own words, for he had said that he would have wed her had she been noble, which she now is, and by this qualification she argues that they should marry. Her wisdom, then, is strategy for a particular end. She uses the king's purposeless and tyrannical attempts at wisdom to secure her father's safety and her own empowerment. Later in the chapter I will briefly refer to the *rime riche* couplets and rhetorical strategies Peronelle uses within the tale. For now, it is evident that these colloquial sounding rhymes are not transparent or merely functional filler. In *The Tale of Three Questions*, they are an interpretative key, as readers compare different definitions of wisdom. The same rhyme that undercuts the king's pretensions sets up Peronelle as a truly wise person.

It is no accident that Genius delivers the majority of the *rime riche* couplets of the poem—he speaks about 179 in the tales and another 139 in his conversation with Amans and in his major lectures on religion and education in Books 5 and 7. In contrast, Amans' couplets, including Gower's couplets from the Prologue and the end of Book 8, add up to less than 100.⁵⁹ This breakdown makes sense for someone of

⁵⁸ Bullón-Fernandez, *Fathers and Daughters*, 72.

⁵⁹ My figures (139, 179, and 96—or 414 total) are larger than Ito's because I counted *rime riche* couplets identical in form and ones with two words rhyming with one--*aweie* / *a weie* adds another 10 couplets, for example, *otherwise* / *wise* another 7, and *Goddeshalf* / *half* is another 2, though Macaulay adds a space in one and not the other. I also counted words of near identical spelling, such as *wyse* / *wise* (2), *asent* / *assent* (4), *Maii* / *mai* (4). Ito also counts some of these [e.g., *comune* / *commune* (2); *pleine* / *pleigne* (2)] but chooses some and not others. I estimate his figures would roughly break down as follows: 128 couplets for Genius, 159 in the tales, and 87 for Amans. That gives us 374 couplets, which is nine couplets off the mark, but I am unable to resolve the discrepancy since Ito does not provide an index with his 383 couplets. To make matters more confusing, he seems to have missed a few couplets. For example, his count is one short for *laste*, *leve*, and *reule*, which actually contain 30, 20, and 13 couplets. If my figures are more accurate than his, though, this is due not to my diligence

Genius' position as confessor. *Rime riche* works well with his didactic speaking style and lends his words a sententious air. Even the colloquialisms create a proverbial, homespun feel as phrases passed down for generations, fashioned with pat phrasing as though the messages were obvious. The couplets, I would argue, are Genius' efforts to instruct and circumscribe Amans. Therein lies their metamorphic quality, the use of language to define Amans and form him.

A brief mention of James Simpson's *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry* is relevant here for its in-depth study of the word *enformacioun* that proves complementary to an analysis of *rime riche*. *Enformacioun* does not merely signify information in the modern sense. To a medieval audience, it designates the act of artistry and pedagogy, of shaping the recipient to an ideal state (MED, *informacioun*, 1(a) instruction, direction, teaching; 3(a) inspiration, activation). Simpson credits God and Genius alike with this informative power. Simpson adds that the word mostly "denotes not a thing, but an action . . . To 'enforme', however, is not simply to teach, but to teach according to an ideal pattern, with the aim of forming the recipient of the teaching."⁶⁰ Thus Genius is not just passing down lore to Amans but is trying to *enforme* Amans didactically and artistically—to both instruct and perfect him. Simpson's study reminds his readers of the *forme* in *enforme*, the hands-on aspect of sculpting the soul and giving it form.

Gower's awareness of *enformacioun* as a process of letting the "forme enforme" is evident in his rhyme. Simpson does not treat rhyme in his study but in a footnote he makes a suggestive comment on where these key words appear in the lines:

Pickles and Dawson 1987 list thirty-nine instances of 'enformacion' and

but to Pickles and Dawson's invaluable *Concordance* with its index of line endings, a resource unavailable to Ito at the time of his book.

⁶⁰ Simpson, *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry*, 5.

‘enforme’; sixteen of these refer to Genius’ teaching of Amans, and in all but two of these examples, the word appears finally in the line. Where the words appear as part of the narration, they tend to appear within the line rather than finally.⁶¹

Simpson wanted to know if the words were used in some situations and by some speakers but not others, and this led to an interesting if unsubstantiated argument (in this case) to differentiate and privilege Genius’ speech over other portions of the text.⁶² Perhaps a more fruitful question, though, is this: since Gower positions most of these words at the end of the line, what does he rhyme them with? I did not find a pattern with the rhymes of “enformacio(u)n,” which rhymed with a different word in almost every instance, but there were strong patterns for “enforme” and “enformed.” All 24 of these couplets were *rime riche* variants. “Enformed” rhymed with “conformed” and “formed,” which underscore the sense of form informing the words. Even more striking is the pattern for the word “enforme.” Out of the 22 instances “enforme” appears in the *Confessio*, twenty times the word appears at the end of the line, and all twenty times, Gower rhymes it with the word “forme.” “Forme” itself occurs 75 times in the *Confessio*, 33 times at the end of the line—also paired with “transforme,” “reforme,” “conforme,” and once in a pure *rime riche* on “forme.” The couplets are used in tales of metamorphosis, as in Nectanabus’ shape-shifting or

⁶¹ Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, 6. There seems to be a typing error in the numbers; Pickles and Dawson list 22 instances of “enforme” and seven total of “enformacion” and “enformacioun.” One can reach Simpson’s figure of 39 by adding the ten instances of “enformed.” Even with this correction, though, the footnote makes Genius’ use of these words and their position in the line seem more exemplary than is the case, for Simpson omits that 20 out of the 22 instances of “enforme” and all seven instances of “enformacio(u)n” occur at the end of the line, while “enformed,” the word missing from his footnote, is less prominently positioned, with only four out of ten instances at the end of the line. Thus 31 out of 39 instances appear at the end of the line, which indicates that these are words that Gower positions for us to see at the end of the line regardless of whether Genius is instructing Amans or not.

⁶² Simpson asserts that, in narration, instances of the word ‘enforme’ tend to occur mid-line, and Genius’ uses occur at the end of the line, but this is not so. See 2.301-2, 2.2885-6, 2.343-4, 5.3501-2 for instances of ‘enforme’ that occur in the tales. See 2.607, 4.215, 7.4098 for instances of ‘enformed’ in the tales. Out of the four times the word ‘enformed’ occurs at the end of the line, three times are in narration (the other is not spoken in dialogue to Amans but rather in Genius’ long treatise on cosmology, 7.217). For examples of Genius using ‘enformed’ mid-line in his instruction of Amans, see 2.2121, 3.1313, and 8.259. The word *enforme* is indeed extremely important for Gower’s poem, but it can be valued more broadly than Simpson’s study on Genius.

during the tale of Ceyx and Alcyone. Mostly though, the word *forme*, when at the end of the line, rhymes with “enforme,” as though the two, to Gower’s thinking, belong together.

As Simpson shows, these *forme / enforme* couplets often convey a process of intellectual shaping between Genius and Amans:

Unto thin ere I thenke enforme.
Now herkne, for this is the forme. (2.2499-2500)

And again:

Mi sone, that thou miht enforme
Thi pacience upon the forme
Of olde ensamples (3.1753-4)

What Simpson’s study does brilliantly is differentiate between Genius’ idea of *forme* in contrast to Amans’ idea. They use the same rhymes but with different goals.

Simpson highlights Amans’ couplet in which he expresses a desire to be “enformed” with “forme,” though he is referring to knowledge of love’s craft:

That I am evere curious
Of hem that conne best enforme
To knowe and witen al the forme
What falleth unto loves craft. (4.923-5).

Amans uses this variant *rime riche* on *forme* only a few times. His definition of “forme” is decidedly more physical than Genius’ understanding and refers to a body of carnal knowledge. He longs for the “forme” of his beloved’s body in 3.1731-2, and in 5.6675-6 he is jealous of Nectanabus who can change his “forme” and so seduce his lady. It is Genius who brings in other definitions and underscores storytelling as *enforming*, something that shapes the listener. In both of Genius’ couplets quoted above, the “forme” is the tale Genius proposes to tell, the story matter. In one of its many definitions for *forme*, the Middle English Dictionary defines the noun in this literary sense, as a style of writing, a literary device, a genre, or the wording of a text.

Storytelling, for Genius, becomes a way to use this literary matter to instigate metamorphosis, to fill the ear and mold the mind.

It seems to me that *rime riche* and *rime riche* variants are another important *forme*, open to the eye, audible to the ear, to achieve this informing purpose. *Rime riche*'s overt form gives the couplet a pat, rounded quality—deceptively so, since the repetition presents a puzzle to the reader, an invitation to tease out the connections between the rhyme words, to follow language's nuances and direction. *Rime riche* is *forme* used to *enforme*.

Hence, it seems to me that when Genius declares that “be londe and ek be Schipe” a man “mot travaile for worschipe,” he uses the sententious power of a *rime riche* variant to weigh upon Amans' conscience (4.1627). There is a subtle informing power at work in such couplets, as well as a circularity to the reasoning behind it, for Genius defines *worschipe* by the word within it, at its heart, using this arbitrary aural connection to seek broader implications. His definition imposes a course of action on Amans, tugging him to go abroad as the means to achieve honor and his desire.

Earlier in the same discussion, Genius asks Amans what he has done for his lady:

What hast thou don of besischipe
To love and to the ladischipe
Of hire which thi ladi is? (4.1119-1120)

At first this rhyme seems to have nothing to do with ships—it is just a shared syllable yoking the two concepts with a proverbial ring: to win a lady's favor, a man needs to be active. This sounds obvious. Yet Genius ingeniously builds on that rhyme's scaffolding by fleshing out just what kind of *besischipe* he means—namely, a ship. The subsequent ship and Rodes cluster (“So that be londe and ek be Schipe / He mot travaile for worschipe / And make manye hastyf rodes, / Sometime in Prus, sometime in Rodes”) reinforces Genius' distinction between an idle, unworthy lover and an active and worthy one (4.1627-30). The couplets steer Amans to go abroad.

Couplet Wars

Genius' couplets do not fall on deaf ears. To those of us sitting comfortably in armchairs, the *rime riche* is charming; to Amans, the sententiously crafted words are unwelcome. He does not want to set sail, worship or no, and he struggles not only against Genius' idea but also the rhetorical and prosodic techniques with which it is delivered. Showing that two can play at this verbal naval battle, Amans responds in kind, and says if his lady wanted him to travel, he would fly heavenward to please her, but otherwise there is little point leaving his beloved behind,

Ther scholde me non ydelschipe
Departen fro hir ladischipe. (4.1729-1730)

Amans is changing the terminology. Earlier in his long and somewhat discursive speech, he attacks the ostensible commonsense of Genius' approach as counterproductive. Going abroad would only take him from his lady, and hence being on a *schipe* would result in its own breed of *ydelschipe*. His redefinition overthrows Genius' concept of idleness and worship. Yet Amans speaks through both sides of his mouth. What does he mean when he says no *ydelschipe* will keep him from his lady? Substitute the word *schipe*, and we understand him. Even as he says that to do her bidding he would fly through the air or swim the deep sea (1714-1715), he seems more determined than ever to hover near her. In other words, Amans only clings to conventions of courtship, not a real voyage.⁶³ He has rendered all the forms of

⁶³ Indeed he will not willingly leave her room and dares to invent reasons to remain:

I take leve, and if I schal,
I kisse hire, and go forthwithal.
And otherwhile, if that I dore,
Er I come fulli to the dore,
I torne agein and feigne a thing . . . (4.2823-7)

Genius' *schipe* and *besischipe* a metaphor, not Genius' unpleasant reality. Amans' syntax is unusually oblique here, but he needs these rhyme words to make his counterargument and bring the *schipe* full circle.

These *schipe* examples show what I see happening in *rime riche* couplets and key *rime riche* variants. In the *Tale of Constance*, the rhyme encapsulates the tale's meaning, pinpointing a saving moment of transformation in her life. The dialogue between Genius and Amans also shows this metamorphic tendency, for Genius is trying to change Amans, who resists with a reprisal couplet. Genius' and Amans' rhymes also show *rime riche* to be a rhetorical strategy, self-consciously crafted by the speakers to manipulate the listener, or even the speaker himself. Sometimes it seems as if there were a couplet war going on between Genius and Amans, because they both use *rime riche* to support their arguments, as in their naval battle in rhyme discussed above, which engages in a metamorphosis of words and ideas.

To understand this subtle war of words, it is worth pausing for a moment to consider that Gower is using *rime riche* for its sound and sense play, but he is using the couplet as his unit of thought. *Rime riche* is not unfamiliar to Gower, who uses 241 *rime riche* couplets in his *Mirour de l'Omme*.⁶⁴ But the couplet as a discrete unit, used by different speakers as building blocks, is a new device for him. The *Mirour's* rhyme scheme complements the artfulness in Gower's language. At its most extravagant, Gower's sound play flows through several lines (play that is absent from Wilson's translation):

Et puis, qant nonne vint a point,
Jhesus, q'estoit en fieble point
Selonc le corps, a dieu pria,
Au fin q'il ne se venge point

Amans fixates not on the wide world but on the most intimate of architectural spaces and staying within the threshold. The *rime riche* underscores how Amans sees the world in metaphor: A door is a kind of dare for Amans, a signal to take risks and remain inside, or else be thrust beyond the sight of his lady.

⁶⁴ Ito, 215.

De ceaux qui l'ont batu ou point (28741-5)

And then, when the hour of nones arrives, Jesus, who was then feeble in body, prayed to God that He should not take vengeance on those who has beaten and pierced Him.⁶⁵

Gower uses the rhyme word “point” several times, each with a different meaning. The point is to play with the rhyme word’s fluidity, not a fixed point but one that flows along with the verse. This type of ornate repetition, exuberantly spilling from one line to the next, is rare in Gower’s English poem, no doubt due in part to the difference between the *Mirour*’s 12-line stanza form (aab aab bba bba) and the *Confessio*’s octosyllabic couplets.⁶⁶ The *Confessio* contains a few wordplays spanning three lines, such as the word *beguile*, which is repeated or played on five times as a sententious variation of the phrase “what goes around comes around.” Indeed, the word “beguile” comes full circle, changing from the active to the passive voice:

For often he that wol beguile
Is guiled with the same guile,
And thus the guilour is beguiled. (6.1379-80)⁶⁷

⁶⁵ All translations of the *Mirour* are from *Mirour de l’Omme (The Mirror of Mankind)*, trans. by William Burton Wilson (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1992).

⁶⁶ One question worth further study is whether Gower uses *rime riche* to the same effect in both his French and English poems. After an initial study of the *Mirour*, I would argue that Gower is using *rime riche* for its poetic ornament and sententious weight, with less of a metamorphic undercurrent than we see in the *Confessio*. Also, since the *Mirour* does not have exchanges between different speakers, it lacks that manipulative “couplet war.” However, the *Mirour* shows an interest the semantic implications of wordplay that will later become an important technique in the *Confessio*. For example, Adam and Eve are “tout nu a nue / En paradis dessoutz la nue” [naked man and naked woman in Paradise underneath the sky] (90-91). The couplet hints at the appropriateness of being naked under the naked sky and offers a portrait of God and man living unveiled before the Fall. Another clever couplet rhyme explores how Mary is like and unlike all other women. She is the *enceinte seinte*: “O tu virgine et mere seinte, / Le dolour de la femme enceinte / A ta dolour n’est resemblant” [O Virgin and holy Mother, the pains of a woman in labor are not equal to your pains] (29110-12). Even as the narrator insists that Mary cannot be compared to a pregnant woman, the couplet rhyme connects the two concepts of sainthood and pregnancy. She is holy because of her pregnancy, and the word “enceinte” (pregnant) contains the word “seinte,” just as Mary’s body contained Christ. For the *Mirour*’s wordplay, see Ito’s chapter on pages 250-271. All quotations from the *Mirour* are from G. C. Macaulay, *The Works of John Gower: The French Works* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1899).

⁶⁷ Without using *rime riche*, Chaucer also uses similar wordplay in his *Roman de la Rose* translation: “And gile giled and gilours” (6824) and in *The Reeve’s Tale*: “A gylour shal hymself bigyled be” (A 4321). In Gower, the proverbial material complements the sententious weight of *rime riche*. See Whiting G491. For other instances in the *Confessio* of wordplay overflowing the boundaries of the

For the most part, however, a rhyme word's sound play is confined to the couplet, usually in the form of *rime riche* or *rime riche* variants. Gower builds clusters with couplets, but he varies the rhymes—he never uses two identical *rime riche* rhymes back to back, with perhaps one exception.⁶⁸ The *Confessio*'s clusters show couplets working together, adding weight to one another, yet the sound play in each of them is a self-contained unit. His clusters, then, are more like a box containing individual Faberge eggs than one interlocking piece of art as in the example above from the *Mirour*.

Genius' and Amans' couplets, then, serve as pawns that make precise movements, small but able to shift the balance in a game that is ever polite, sophisticated, and yet competitive. A well-placed couplet may be all it takes to make one's point and influence one's audience. Clusters, by contrast, are more of a burst of *rime riche* energy, a volley of couplets that makes the character's point more intently. Ito notes that the *rime riche* clusters are largely found in the dialogues between Genius and Amans, which speaks to the colloquial character of *rime riche*, but I would add that the clusters add emphasis, even an edge, to their dialogue.⁶⁹ The most famous cluster is Amans' dense passage early in Book 5. Throughout Book 4, Genius has been pitching moralizing couplets at Amans that try to steer his actions away from sloth, and Book 5 begins with a new subject of scrutiny: Amans' avarice. Tapping into *rime riche*'s power, Amans shows he too has rhetorical authority. With it, he refutes Genius' inquiries on avarice and declares his passion. His words ring with

couplet, see also *cowthe* (1.2861-2862), *supplaunte* (2.2368-2370), *kinde* (3.373-375), *drunke* (6.475-7), and *hiere* (8.1211-1213).

⁶⁸ The closest he gets is a double variant of *tauhte* / *betauhte* / *tawht* / *betawht* (7.717-720); also worthy of mention are a few couplets that give the appearance of *rime riche* with words that actually form couplets with different rhyme words, such as *covenant* / *supplaunt* / *supplaunte* / *plaunte* in 2.2367-70, in which the end stop and enjambment reinforces the bond between *supplaunt* and *supplaunte*; or *made* / *glade* / *glad* / *lad* in 8.1318-19. But these are exceptional cases.

⁶⁹ Ito, 225.

rime riche's emphatic echo:

And in this wise, taketh kepe,
If I hire hadde, I wolde hire kepe,
And yit no friday wolde I faste,
Thogh I hire kepte and hielde faste.
Fy on the bagges in the kiste!
I hadde ynogh, if I hire kiste.
For certes, if sche were myn,
I hadde hir lever than a Myn
Of Gold; for al this worldesriche
Ne mihte make me so riche
As sche, that is so inly goode.
I sette noght of other goode . . . (5.79-90)

This *tour de force* is immediately noteworthy for its six consecutive *rime riche* couplets. Moreover, the passage contains the *Confessio*'s only instances of *rime riche* for the words "kiste" and "myn." Amans seems to be staking out a space in which to pursue his lady as well as a poetic space, fortified with *rime riche*.

Despite or perhaps because of his exclamatory fervor, *rime riche* is a double-edged weapon in Amans' hands. He protests too much against the vice of avarice, and the couplets he uses in his defense offer a telling glimpse into his obsession. As he fantasizes about possessing this woman, the passage indicates what she means to him. In the first two couplets, it is for other people to "kepe," or take heed, and "faste," or abstain from indulgent behavior. However, Amans pairs these lines with identically spelled words that convey an opposing, acquisitive, and rapacious meaning.⁷⁰ Amans will "kepe" and "hielde faste" his lady if he gets an opportunity. Amans blurs together the language of love and money, so that even as he distinguishes his beloved from financial goods, his lady proves to be just a different kind of "goode" for his "kiste" or moneybox.

The claim to differentiate the two passions unravels because he uses the same words to make that claim. Eager to get "riche," Amans shows avarice for his prized

⁷⁰ There is a helpful discussion of avarice in this passage in Olsen, 55-6. Also see Owen, 408.

object. The long string suggests his desire to turn language to his own ends and circumscribe his lady with words that determine her fate. As in Midas' guilty touch mentioned a little later, Amans bears responsibility and some "gilt" in how his language turns her into an object (5.292). There is an implied risk that Amans' passion will mar his lady's humanity in yet another Ovidian metamorphosis, as it has for Callisto, Daphne, and so many other women. *Rime riche* serves a dual purpose here, then: to persuade Genius and himself of his innocence. Yet the couplets reveal the full story of Amans' innocent claims and his culpable passion.

Heather Dubrow detects a similar tension between aesthetic rhyme and offensive content at work in Marvell's country house poem "Upon Appleton House":

A Stately Frontispice of Poor
Adorns without the open Door (65-6).

It is prettily said, yet this treatment of poor people as a glorified doormat is offensive. "'Stately,'" she writes, "suggests that the poor have acquired some of the values of the house; they rhyme with it. They have been turned from a threat to the house into an adornment."⁷¹ The seductive promise of language is that it smoothes over all quibbles, eliding social injustice by privileging aesthetic harmony, but such is a mirage, and the truth remains behind the calm-faced epigram.

So, too, with Amans, the skill of *rime riche* and the charming sense of humor cannot hide his avarice; in fact, *rime riche* showcases his vice by drawing attention to the avaricious words that Amans wishes to claim are furthest from his lips. The *rime riche* fusillade demonstrates Amans' conscious if uncontrolled use of language, his zest and pride in his lady and his poetic praise of her—and his intense desire to have her. The insistence upon his purity also hints at a slight touchiness. Amans does not just answer Genius' question; he bulldozes those inquiries with this emphatic speech,

⁷¹ Heather Dubrow, "Formalism and the Country House Poem," *Modern Language Quarterly*, 61:1, March 2000, 72.

as though he needs to prove his innocence to himself.

We also see Amans' readiness to fire off *rime riche* couplets in a few shared couplets between Genius and Amans. Though Gower usually has his speakers finish their speech and couplet simultaneously, it is not uncommon for Amans or Genius to share a couplet, with one character speaking and the other responding within the same rhymed space (e.g., 4.1117-8; 5.1373-4; 5.1381-2). However, there are three instances in which Amans finishes Genius' couplets with *rime riche*, two of which occur in this passage from the end of Book 3:

“Mi sone, er we departe atwinne,
I schal behinde nothing leve.”
“*Mi goode fader, be your leve*
Thanne axeth forth what so you list,
For I have in you such a trist,
As ye that be my soul hele,
That ye fro me wol nothing hele,
For I schal telle you the trowthe.”
“Mi sone, art thou coupable of Slowthe
In eny point which to him longeth?”
“*My fader, of tho pointz me longeth*
To wite plainly what thei meene” (3.2750-61; my italics)

Genius speaks in a fatherly, authoritative way to Amans, who replies politely yet renders his submissive words ambiguous by completing Genius' couplets with jingling rich rhymes. This passage demonstrates how pointed colloquial turns of phrase can be. Amans' seemingly deferential “be your leve” artfully weaves Genius' speech into his own response. The following *hele / hele* couplet confirms that Amans uses *rime riche* consciously, and if he were not being overt enough he polishes off yet another one of Genius' dangling couplets with rich rhyme. Charles Muscatine, in a different context, called such repetition in dialogue the “hollow echo of agreement” and a kind of verbal fencing.⁷² Here and throughout the *Confessio*, Amans seems to compete with Genius over rhyme and the authority it confers. Genius employs 179 *rime riche*

⁷² Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition* (Berkeley: UC Press, 1957), 156-7.

couplets in the tales and another 139 couplets in dialogue with Amans, who thus is on the receiving end of this sententious device but requites this discourse with his own conspicuous stock of rich rhyme (Amans/Gower uses 96 rich rhymes). Amans may only be Genius' pupil and "son," but he is a chip off the old sententious block. Only Amans finishes Genius' couplets with *rime riche*, not the other way around.⁷³ Even as he pretends to confess his ignorance meekly (he does not know what Sloth in its variations might "meene"), Amans demonstrates his ear for Genius' words and the feisty wit to spin them into words of his own.⁷⁴

This posture of not understanding words even as he shows a mastery of them is suggestive of *rime riche*'s power to close off language as much as open it up. The moment might profitably be compared to the tale of Aspidis, the serpent that shuts out the sounds of deadly charms by pressing one ear to the ground and plugging up the other with his tail. Turned in on himself, he hears nothing. This posture is suggestively described with *rime riche*:

He leith doun his on ere al plat
 Unto the ground, and halt it faste,
 And ek the other ere als faste
 He stoppeth with his tail . . . (1.472-475)

The symmetry of the *rime riche* couplet mimics the symmetry of the snake: its two ears are stopped up "faste" with the rounded curve of the body turned in on itself.

⁷³ The closest Genius comes to completing Amans' couplet with *rime riche* is with a quasi-*rime riche*. I found only one instance (though there may be more in this somewhat flexible category of *rime riche* variants), in which Amans asks Genius to define the word "gentilesce" for him which Genius then expounds upon at length: "to telle I you beseche." / "The ground, mi sone, for to seche / Upon this diffinicion . . ." (4.2202-2204). In this example, Genius holds the authority over language, a power he asserts in his subsequent six *rime riche* couplets and five variants (*understonde* / *stonde*, 2213-2214; *charge*, *hiere*, 2241-2244; *goode*, 2283-2284; *weie* / *aweie*, 2297-2298; *reule*, *wommanhiede* / *hiede*, 2303-2306; *laste*, 2315-2316; *wise*, 2323-2324; *ydelschipe* / *felaschipe*, 2329-2330; *bore* / *forbore*, 2343-2344).

⁷⁴ On 6.1359-1360, Amans performs the same act of linguistic skill coupled with pretended ignorance: "Mi sone, if thou of such a lore
 Hast ben er this, I red thee leve."
 "Min holi fader, be youre leve . . . I wot noght o word what ye mene."

Rime riche, like Aspidis' positioning, is a way of filtering out the language that one does not wish to hear. Locked safely in one's own *rime riche* couplet, unwanted "wordes weyved" (479) pass by unheeded. For Amans, *rime riche* may provide a similar safeguard. Its form gives Amans a way of walling out Genius' words, turning them to his own purposes, though this seemingly controlled form may contain content contrary to Amans' intentions.

Ever polite, Amans has traditionally been read as a character whose job it is to listen meekly to Genius' every sententious turn of phrase and tale. Amans is the pupil, Genius the master. Whiting, for example, observed that Genius speaks a far greater number of proverbs and sententious phrases than Amans does: "Sometimes the lover uses a proverb or two, but this is relatively rare, and the Confessor occasionally pours out a whole stream" of such proverbs for Amans' edification.⁷⁵ If, however, there is indeed a couplet war of sorts going on, a whole new dimension to Amans and his relationship to Genius becomes apparent. Polite nothings from both speakers are no longer "nothings" but words conscientiously colored with *rime riche*. Amans notes Genius' authoritative, sententious expressions and responds to them in kind. Though Genius delivers the bulk of the *rime riche* couplets, Amans makes up in quality for what he lacks in quantity, with *rime riche* couplets unique to the poem, conspicuous clusters, and even a few lines that complete Genius' couplets with *rime riche*. If rhyme is an avenue of interpretation to Gower's poem, it affords a different side to Genius and Amans, showing them as both attentive listeners and craftsmen of language.

⁷⁵ Bartlett J. Whiting, *Chaucer's Use of Proverbs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1934), 153. Whiting comments that this sententious matter occurs primarily in conversations between Amans and Genius, not in the tales: "Gower . . . excludes them [proverbial material] rigorously from his stories." The placing of proverbs in Genius and Amans' conversations suggestively corresponds with the positioning of *rime riche*. Although Whiting considers Genius a cardboard character, a "manual" spouting proverbial material, the *rime riche* accompanying these proverbs reveals his sense of verbal complexity and the desire to display it. Manuals do not require *rime riche* to instruct their readers.

Eating Rich Words: Chaucer's Rich, Gower's Rich Rhyme, and Pot Pie

The sententious power of *rime riche* seems clear from the exchanges between Genius and Amans; what I wish to explore now is the dramatic power of *rime riche*—that is, what brilliance and authority are conferred upon the tales' internal characters for speaking with such devices, and whether on some level fellow characters hear these rhymes. Characters in the tales who hope to effect change of some sort for love, power, or money use rich rhymes in direct discourse for their authoritative, persuasive power. Thus in her letter Penelope chides her far-away husband (a man worthy of Genius' *worschipe* if ever there was one):

Sithe ferst than ye fro home wente,
That welnyh every man his wente
To there I am, whil ye ben oute . . . (4.167-169)

Using a play on a noun and verb, she notes that Odysseus *wente* away from her—the opposite direction taken by her suitors. The repetition of *wente* points out his potential misdirection all along, draws attention to her words, and gets him to read her letter and listen to her—and even if he does not, we, her other readers, do.

Like Gautier and other French and English poets including Chaucer, the bulk of Gower's *rime riche* couplets are delivered by a narrator, yet in the *Confessio Amantis*, that narrator is Genius, not Gower, and Amans reacts to Genius' *rime riche* couplets in a sophisticated couplet war in which the frame narrative's fictional characters indeed hear rhyme. That rhyme impresses a fictional audience is borne out in Chaucer's use of the device, delivered by the noble Black Knight, wily Pandarus, and others; however, there is less “quyting” of rhyme in Chaucer than one might expect of an author who makes verbal payback central to the *Canterbury Tales* in the famous competition between pilgrims, particularly the Miller and the Knight. For the

characters inside the actual *Canterbury Tales*, couplet wars and quytting rhymes are not found to the degree that they are in the *Confessio*, in which *rime riche* couplets serve to undermine morally dubious authority, mainly of kings who oppress their subjects. The empowered voices of these kings' subjects, in turn, possess an alternative authority as commoners use *rime riche* to question kings and as women like Peronelle and Thaïse confront men and have the final word. That Gower bestows this sententious device on peasants and women allows him not only to enrich his critique of kingship but to confer poetic power on the peasants and women making that critique.

Rich rhyme operates on seeming repetition, and that repetition in sound if not sense can put an edge on exchanges between characters, as between the exchanges of Amans and Genius. Stephen Knight points out that verbal repetition, not double entendre, is Chaucer's primary mode of punning.⁷⁶ This play with repetition includes quytting rhyme with rhyme. Most famously, the Miller vows to "quite with the Knightes tale," and not only quites the tale's content but its rhyme (A 3119). For example, when Emelye prays to Diana and witnesses the fire flare and then fizzle, the Knight uses two seemingly identical words to describe the flames, viewed by a girl caught between two seemingly identical men:

But sodeynly she saugh a sighte queynte,
For right anon oon of the fyres queynte,
And quyked agayn, and after that anon
That oother fyr was queynt and al agon;
And as it queynte, it made a whistelynge
As doon thise wete brondes in hir brennynge (A 2333-8)

Emelye's sexual anxieties linger unspoken in the couplet; "queynte" is repeated four times but its sexual reference is denied, and metaphors of sexual passion are displaced

⁷⁶ Stephen Knight, *Rhyming Craftily: Meaning in Chaucer's Poetry* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973), 50.

by more literal fires. As if in reaction to this passage, the Miller brilliantly if ungraciously exposes this resisted definition of “queynte,” grabbing at the definition eschewed by polite society even as Nicholas grabs Alison while her husband is away:

As clerkes ben ful subtile and ful queynte;
And prively he caughte hire by the queynte (A 3275-6)

In this *queynte* quytting, the Miller not only appropriates the Knight’s subject matter for his fabliau but rhymes tit for tat against the Knight’s careful couplet. This case of hearing a rhyme and responding in kind reveals Chaucer’s development of rich rhyme throughout his poetic career, not just in his earliest poems like *Book of the Duchess*.

Chaucer’s use of *rime riche* has been downplayed in Gower scholarship since Masayoshi Ito’s foundational study, which tabulats *rime riche* in Chaucer and Gower, noting that Gower employs 383 *rime riche* couplets in his *Confessio Amantis* and 241 in his *Mirour de l’Omme*, while Chaucer employs only 111 in his entire corpus.⁷⁷ However, as Ito notes, these numbers refer to *rime riche* as they appear in couplets, and Chaucer uses the device in his stanzas, split *rime riche*, on 81 occasions.⁷⁸ Ito points out that Gower’s works still contain many more instances of *rime riche*. Even so, it seems important to stress the continuity between these two authors before exploring their differences in qualitative, not just quantitative, terms. Both authors use *rime riche* as a site for verbal play and poetic authority that glosses on narrated action; the Miller, moreover, gains a poetic edge over his social superior by appropriating the authoritative heft of *rime riche* six times in his Prologue and Tale. There may be a similar aspect of social ambition in the Merchant’s eight instances of rich rhyme (in the *Canterbury Tales*, only *The Knight’s Tale*, with twelve instances, is greater).

In the fictive world of Chaucer’s tales, however, it is for noblemen, the rich, to speak with rich rhyme. Chaucer’s *rime riche*-speakers abound with knights, including

⁷⁷ Ito, 215.

⁷⁸ Ito, 230.

young Arcite and old January, the knight from *The Squire's Tale*, one-dimensional Thopas and the complex Black Knight. Chaucer uses this French rhyme to mark a higher social valence to their aristocratic speech, a poet's means to confer refined "Frankish fare" as a separate species of speech on the lips of courtly men.⁷⁹ Their rich rhymes reflect knightly pursuits like honor and love; Arcite, January, and Troilus all pursue a maiden ("may") either in May or as well as they may, a little pun to show courtliness. The Black Knight's couplets—he has eight *rime riche* couplets out of fifteen in the poem—reveal his cultured grief, aestheticized in courtly terms that Geoffrey so famously misunderstands. It is a matter of station for men like the Black Knight to speak so. Even Hector, noted as a plain speaker and even "inarticulate" uses rich rhyme and thereby puns on what is here and what is heard (*TC* 1.121-3).⁸⁰ This does not mean that Hector's prose is purple, but that his language reflects his rank.

These themes of social ambition, wealth, and power are prominent in Book 5 of the *Confessio*, in which avarice is explored from complex angles—not just greed for lucre, but power over people. Amans' *rime riche* cluster discussed earlier reveals his avarice is erotic, not financial:

Fy on the bagges in the kiste!
 I hadde ynogh, if I hire kiste.
 For certes, if sche were myn,
 I hadde hir lever than a Myn
 Of Gold; for al this worldesriche
 Ne mihte make me so riche
 As sche, that is so inly goode.
 I sette noght of other goode. . . (5.83-90)

Each *rime riche* couplet tries to differentiate Amans' desire from avaricious behavior, but because Amans uses the same words for both, the differences collapse. The couplet itself serves as a *kiste*, encasing the lady in a sphere of rich rhyme, and the

⁷⁹ *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ed. J. J. Anderson and A. C. Cawley (London: Everyman, 1994), 1116.

⁸⁰ Knight, *Rhyming Craftily*, 65, 76.

artful couplets read like aural confections with which Amans imagines hoarding the object of his desire in grasping couplets that increasingly spill over with breathless enjambment.

Two kings later in the book use similar *rime riche*-styled chests to trick and entrap their subjects. In the *Tale of the Two Coffers*, a king tests his grumbling men, who apparently have not been compensated in quite some time, with a guessing game of pick-the-right-chest, as found in *The Merchant of Venice*, except that the king uses two chests with identical exteriors:

Anon he let tuo cofres make
Of o semblance and of o make (5.2295-6)⁸¹

Gower's rhyme parallels the action of the king, who in essence manufactures a *rime riche* object, identical without though different within. The emphasis on oneness—"o semblance," "o make," and one rhyme—frames the dual scenarios made possible: the knights and officers will either get a fortune or nothing. They pick the wrong chest, and this supposedly teaches them not to grumble against their king. So authoritative is the nonverbal, false riddle (false because it demands an arbitrary choice and cannot be intellectually decoded) and so sententious the *rime riche* that Genius never questions if this is the correct method to handle the situation, nor whether the king actually did overlook advancing the men. Deflecting attention from himself and onto the chests, the king crafts a moral that hinges on the grumbling men's failure to differentiate between identical exteriors, not to moralize on his behavior. The scene reveals how duplicity—seeming sameness belying difference, a *rime riche* technique—is a source for abused power, as the king misleadingly diverts attention from his own behavior and onto that of his subjects.

⁸¹ Just as rhyme is the key to these coffers, so in Shakespeare's play, rhyme solves the riddle: "Tell me where is Fancy bred, / Or in the heart or in the head? / How begot, how nourished?" Portia's rhyme points to the answer: lead. Debra Fried, "Rhyme Puns," 84.

The following *Tale of the Beggars and the Two Pastries* presents a similar guessing game, but what complicates this version is that Gower allows an alternative authority, empowered with *rime riche*, to challenge the emperor and moralize on his actions. One day, a beggar cries out to the emperor, Frederick,

“Ha, lord, wel mai the man be riche
Whom that a king list for to riche.” (5.2397-98)

This is literally a rich rhyme, and the cry, “Ha,” is not jocular but rather a cry for attention, shared by other characters in need including Ariadne, Procne, and Rosiphelee (who also follow up their cry with *rime riche*). The plea and embellished rhyme elevate the beggar’s speech, though a fellow beggar retorts that God will help whom he will. As though the emperor would one-up the beggar’s *rime riche*, he invites both beggars to dinner and offers a gustatory version of *rime riche*, two pastries identical in appearance but nothing alike inside—one is ordinary, while the other contains florins. Frederick has the unsuspecting beggar choose which culinary homonym he will have. He chooses the pot pie, which leaves his fellow with the pastry filled with florins, rich rhyme indeed.

The stated Boethian moral is that the beggar who uses *rime riche* looks for human help while the other man counts on God, and all got their just desserts. However, this is also a tale about a king reacting against his subject’s words and reinforcing his sovereignty over sententious discourse. It is for the king to instruct, not be instructed. The king did not reward intelligence but vaunted his own wit and arbitrary power, playing God even as he facilitates the message that he is not God. Quite deliberately, he sets the *rime riche* scene: two seemingly identical pastries are given to two seemingly identical beggars, but both pairs are revealed as internally different, one valuable, one base. While the beggar’s wordplay was crafted to pair pauper and king, the king’s act pairs the beggars, who like *rime riche* are the same

outside but apparently different within. The emperor delivers both his pies and his point and so seems to make the beggar eat his words, yet the beggar uses *rime riche* a second time to criticize the king with a moralizing coda:

“Nou have I certainly conceived
That he mai lihtly be deceived,
That tristeth unto mannes helpe;
Bot wel is him whom God wol helpe” (5.2423-26)

Toning down his rhyme word and his ambitions from getting *riche* to getting mere *helpe*, the beggar shows crushed expectations. However, even as he moralizes over his error, his words blame Frederick, who deceived him “lihtly,” making a game out of a pauper’s request. The beggar’s couplet pairs the king with God, just as Frederick had paired the beggars to value one and debase the other: though similar in their power over men, God and Frederick differ at heart. One should trust God, not just because God is good, but because the king betrays trust.

This king is as avaricious as Adrian, the Roman nobleman who falls into a pit and calls “Ha” for help from the pauper Bardus, inverting the scenario of *Two Pastries* by making the nobleman beg (5.4970). If rescued, Adrian vows to give half his fortune to the peasant Bardus, who after heaving out a monkey and snake suspects that he is the butt of a practical joke and needs verbal reassurance before trying again:

“What wiht art thou in Goddes name?”
“I am,” quod Adrian, “the same,
Whos good thou schalt have evene half.”
Quod Bardus, “Thanne a Goddes half
The thridde time assaie I schal.” (5.5013-7)

The echo rhyme resounds with Bardus’ enthusiasm at being offered half. As with the beggar and king in *Two Pastries*, pauper and prince are paired, and though their diction conveys their opposite social classes, they come together under the rhyme. Bardus’ interjections, “Goddes name” and “Goddes half,” reflect his simplicity, yet that second stock phrase quytes the rhyme word, so Adrian and Bardus share equal

space within a couplet hardened by colloquial *rime riche* into a compact under God. Adrian, of course, fails to live up to his half of the bargain until Justinian holds him accountable. Though Genius criticizes Adrian and not the kings in *Two Coffers* and *Two Pastries*, it is a similar issue of shared power with one's subjects that is at stake and resisted.

In Chaucer and Gower, rich rhyme is largely the province of the rich. Aside from Chaucer's frame narrative, only once in the *Canterbury Tales* does a commoner—or at least someone who speaks with the *vox populi*—use *rime riche*, to ask his lord to marry and provide an heir. In *The Clerk's Tale*, a commoner broaches the topic by asking Walter to respect the passage of time: “thenketh, lord, among youre thoghtes wyse / How thatoure dayes passe in sondry wyse” (E 116-7). The phrasing conveys the simple wisdom in the man's reasonable request. Although Walter seems to comply, his reaction is not unlike Frederick, for he quytes his subject's speech with an uneven marriage that mirrors Walter's uneven relationship with his subjects. Chaucer's narrator suggests his sympathy for Walter's subjects in rich rhymes that describe Griselda's patient suffering (E 380-2; 1087-90; 1129-32). In Gower, however, it is not the narrator who voices this imbalance in power but the peasants. Bardus completes a *rime riche* couplet in such a way to remind Adrian to live up to his words. The two men halve a couplet just as they are to halve a fortune, and Bardus is entitled a share in both. Similarly, in *Two Pastries* Gower allows the beggar to quyte his superior directly and gives him the final word, twice. His summary of what a relationship between king and commoner *should* be like, one in which the king helps, not hurts, his subjects, and the elegance of his critique expose the emperor's nonverbal tactics as little more than a prank and a pie fight. Exposing the emperor's duplicity, not to mention folly, of arbitrarily putting coins into a pastry, the tale's true gold lies in the pauper's words.

Mi Weie: the Riches of Women's Words

Rime riche is sententious rhetoric often used to moralize with skill and authority. Wise men like Solomon and the physician Cerymon speak with *rime riche* in the *Confessio*, but clever villains like Boniface and Perseus exploit this tool of persuasion, physically representing duplicity in the repeated couplet rhyme. By concluding his instructions to his clerk with *rime riche*, Boniface lends his plot an air of sanctified rightness. He instructs the young man how to use the trump of brass to sound like God's voice while Celeste sleeps, so that he will hear God's command to relinquish his office. The ruse will literally sound divine,

“Fro hevene as thogh a vois it were,
To soun of such a prolacioun
That he his meditacioun
Therof mai take and understonde,
As thogh it were of Goddes sonde.
And in this wise thou schal seie,
That he do thilke astat aweie
Of pope, in which he stant honoured;
So schal his soule be socured
Of thilke worschipe ate laste
In hevene which schal evere laste.”
This clerc, whan that he hath herd the forme
How he the pope scholde enforme,
Tok of the cardinal his leve . . . (2.2874-87)

Acting as a twisted Genius-figure ‘enforming’ his listener, Boniface ‘forms’ the clerk’s perspective so that he in turn will “enforme” the Pope. He purposely concludes his speech with *rime riche* to bring sententious weight to his evil plan. The affirmation of Celeste’s eternal glory candy-coats the usurpation Boniface plots, as though Boniface and the clerk are doing Celeste a favor in the long run. Thus Boniface’s words steel the clerk’s resolve to deceive. Moreover, Boniface also

intends the clerk to use this *rime riche* couplet: “in this wise thou schal seie” that Celeste should relinquish his office if he wants to go to Heaven. It is indirect discourse, but it seems that Boniface gives the clerk both the form and content of what to speak into the trumpet, and he wants the clerk’s speech to end with the same sonorous pressure of *rime riche*. Boniface offers the clerk a lesson in artful speaking, with Celeste’s deception masked as a means toward salvation. There is no need for Boniface to mention what would happen if Celeste ignores God’s command; the threat seems clear, and this *rime riche* conclusion seems all the more authoritative for showing God’s mercy and calm control over Celeste’s life.

Like the brass trumpet, transformed by Boniface and the clerk into the voice of authority, Boniface’s sententious *rime riche* rings with the sound of truth, and, like the trumpet, *rime riche* is a “vois” that commands (2874). Both use sound to command others, and Gower explores the sound play in these two words, *soune* and *Goddes sonde*, sound and God’s command (2875, 2878). The juxtaposed couplets that end Boniface’s speech and resume with a *rime riche* variant show the formative power of *rime riche*, which Boniface uses to his advantage. The powerful words in this bedroom scene are not just pregnant but impregnating; Celeste in short order “Conceiveth” the desired conviction and is duped much like Olympias and Paulina were by the men who used similar divine voices to deceive these women in other bedroom scenes (2902).

Chaucer’s characters also use *rime riche* to persuade: Theseus uses *rime riche* twice in his First Mover speech, and Pandarus dominates over Troilus and Criseyde with rhymes—11 *rime riche* couplets and another 13 *rime riche* in stanzas. Just as Pandarus’ words abound in proverbs, so his rich rhymes lend a pat finality to his logic. However, in Chaucer, rich rhyme’s rhetorical power is markedly gendered. Theseus and Pandarus use language to open the hearts of their widowed nieces, both passively

moved by speech: Emelye is largely voiceless and Pandarus verbally outmaneuvers Criseyde. Muscatine has praised Criseyde's rhetorical fencing with Pandarus and her ability to recycle his language with a punch; her rich rhymes show this talent, but ultimately her linguistic skill underscores her lack of agency (156-7). For example, just before the bedroom scene, Criseyde uses *rime riche* not to declare her autonomous authority but rather to relinquish it:

“Than, em,” quod she, “doth herof as yow list.
But er he come, I wil up first arise;
And for the love of god, syn al my trist
Is on yow two, and ye ben bothe wise,
So werketh now in so discret a wise,
That I honour may have, and he plesaunce:
For I am here al in your governaunce.” (3.939-45)

Criseyde repeats Pandarus' rich rhyme on *wise*, which he used a hundred lines before in the same conversation, not to quyte him but to put herself under his governance, paradoxically showing her lexical power in her abdication of will (851-2). Perhaps her sharpest fighting words occur the next morning when Pandarus enters the bedroom and asks “how kan ye fare?” She quytes his trite greeting with a rich rhyme that turns the word “fare” on its head: “God help me so, ye caused al this fare...for al youre wordes white” (3.1563-7). Pandarus had previously upbraided Criseyde for not taking action quickly: “For al among that fare / The harm is don, and fare-wel feldefare!” (860-1). Criseyde's rhyme brilliantly exposes the color of Pandarus' seemingly transparent speech. At the same time, however, she succumbs to his verbal fare in word and deed.

Out of 28 speakers of rich rhymes in Chaucer's corpus, only one-fourth are women (Criseyde, Antigone, the Wife of Bath's hag, Cecilia, Anelida, Alcyone, and Dame Abstinence). The *Canterbury Tales* has nine men to two women (counting the pilgrims makes the ratio even more imbalanced). Even when Chaucer finally gives a

woman like Criseyde the sententious power of *rime riche*, her words usually serve the interests of men, rather than critique and remake authority. In Gower's *Confessio*, by contrast, twenty-one characters in the tales use *rime riche*, divided almost fifty-fifty between men and women.⁸² Gower's even-handedness lends authority to women's speech and brings into question the argument that in Gower's text proper speech is the sole province of men.⁸³ It is almost axiomatic in criticism that Gower prizes plain speech over rhetorical sophistication, yet to combat challenges and abusive men, women reveal their linguistic power in a public domain.

María Bullón-Fernández distinguishes between public and private spheres when she contrasts the private reaction to rape by Antiochus' passive daughter to the proactive, public use of language by Thaïse, who is sent to Leonin's brothel but uses the displacing power of language to free herself.⁸⁴ Unlike Antiochus' daughter, Thaïse is a prodigy and riddle master, an ability to manipulate words that complements her use of *rime riche*. To open up a way out of the brothel, she tells Leonin's man,

If so be that thi maister wolde
That I his gold encresce scholde,
It mai nocht falle be this weie;
Bot soffre me to go mi weie
Out of this hous wher I am inne,
And I schal make him for to winne
In som place elles of the toun (8.1449-55)

Thaïse's speech is a more sophisticated version of Miller's demand to tell his tale "or elles go my weie"; there, the Host quytes him with rich rhyme and retorts, "a devel wey!" (A 3133-4). In contrast, Thaïse's speech—from its opening conditional clause

⁸² See Appendix A for a complete list of names and line numbers.

⁸³ Diane Watt, "Literary Genealogy, Virile Rhetoric, and Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," *Philological Quarterly*, Fall 1999; 78; 393-4.

⁸⁴ María Bullón-Fernández, *Fathers and Daughters in Gower's Confessio Amantis* (London: D. S. Brewer, 2000), 55.

to its hypothetical scenarios—allows her to rationalize her insistence on virginity in ways Leonin can appreciate. Female agency is made palatable by the riches she can make for him in a public space, at a women’s school, rather than a private one, and the financial *encresce* candy-coats the *encresce* in rhyme that converts “this weie” to “mi weie.” Offering Leonin riches and *rime riche*, Thaïse’s repetition allows her to speak with a difference and frame the path from *hous* to *toun* as the way to *winne*.

Thaïse’s gift with language is usually attributed to her father, but her mother, the unnamed princess of Pentapolis, similarly expresses in *rime riche* her need to control her sexuality. Writing to her father to declare love for her tutor Apollonius rather than the three princes seeking her hand, she, like Thaïse, insists on having her *weie* and no one else’s:

I wol non other man abide.
 And certes if I of him faile,
 I wot riht wel withoute faile
 Ye schull for me be dowhterles. (8.900-903)

In his notes to this passage, Russell Peck observes that Gower’s source letter expresses no lovesickness that could lead to death.⁸⁵ However, her agonized desire for a potentially mismatched union (Apollonius’ royalty is yet unknown) replays Antiochus’ consuming desire for his daughter. Nowhere is that verbal echo clearer than in Antiochus’ riddle:

Hierof I am inquisitive;
 And who that can mi tale save,
 Al quyt he schal my doghter have;
 Of his ansuere and if he faile,
 He schal be ded withoute faile.
 Forthi mi son,” quod the king,
 “Be wel avised of this thing,
 Which hath thi life in jeupartie.” (8.410-17)

⁸⁵ *Confessio Amantis*, Book 8, n. 889, page 285.

In many ways Gower overlaps the fathers and daughters of Antioch and Pentapolis to invert the power relationship between parent and child. The princess remakes Antiochus' speech—an indirect act of quytting an abusive father—that takes Antiochus' authoritative rhetoric addressed to his “son” (the daughter is never addressed) and gives that power to a daughter addressing her father. If Apollonius solves the riddle, he will be “Al quyte” with marriage; the princess's rhyme, in turn, quytes Antiochus' falsehood with truth, subverting potential riddles with plain knowledge. She quytes Antiochus unknowingly, but that does not detract from the agency shown in charting her path from confinement and confusion to naming her beloved and proposing marriage. A story that begins with a daughter whose will is suffocated by her father shows its counterpart in a daughter who makes her will known, actively forming her “weie” much as her daughter will do later on.

The shared rhyme on *faile*, however, ominously points to the trap of language that repeats because words fail and so mirror the deaths Antiochus and she propose. At her supposed death at sea, *lich* is rhymed with *lich* to underscore Apollonius' sorrow—there is nothing *like* it—before her corpse, her *lich* (1075-6). The simile of sorrow dissolves as words turn in on themselves in deadly sameness, but these rhymes can also heal. When the physician Cerymon discovers the princess' *kiste* (1230), he restores her with rich rhyme (unlike Amans, who put his lady into an imaginary *kiste* with *rime riche*, Cerymon uses *rime riche* to get another woman out of one):

[He] seith, “Ma dame, yee ben hierie
 Wher yee be sauf, as yee schal hierie
 Hierafterward; forthi as nou
 Mi conseil is, conforteth you
 For trusteth wel withoute faile,
 Ther is nothing which schal you faile...” (8.1211-16)

Cerymon's words mark not an end but a beginning, predicated on language originally spoken by Antiochus to kill. Cerymon repeats rhyme words (*hierie*, *faile*), including a

three play on *hiere, hiere, Hierafterward*; clauses (*yee ben hiere...yee be sauf...ye schal hiere*); and alliterative sounds (*conseil...conforteth; wel withoute*). Repetition works as part of the healing process, restoring the princess to life almost by incantation. Indeed, as a physician, Cerymon would know the healing power of words, particularly with reduplicating sounds.⁸⁶ No longer a cyclical trap, verbal repetition ultimately is redeptive, and the princess, though she seems a passive participant in the process, chooses life. If readers consider the tale a lesson for Apollonius in escaping Antiochus' taint, the princess passes the test first. She has endured desire and death and experiences language reversed and remade. As her body recovers, so does her authority: "time com that sche was hol; / And tho thei take her conseil hol" (1257-8). She has lost everything, or thinks she has, but begins her rebirth as an abbess of Diana.

Cerymon's other *rime riche*, on *hiere*, is interesting because five out of the seven instances of these rich rhymes are spoken by women: Rosiphelee, Procne, Ariadne, Lucrece, and Peronelle, as well as Chaucer's Alcyone and Cecilia. Men use this rhyme as well, but Gower's Cerymon and Nectanabus and Chaucer's Hector use it to comfort and inform their (female) audience. Gower's women, however, use it to demand that an audience simply listen.⁸⁷ For unfortunate lovers like Ariadne and Procne, their couplets protest their misfortune. Ariadne addresses Theseus with *rime riche* after Theseus has already abandoned her. Nevertheless, as she says, "al the world schal after hiere" what he has been done to "this woful womman hiere" (5.5445-6). She cannot directly reach Theseus' ears, but she can tell the world of his

⁸⁶ Karen Jolly, "Medieval Magic: Definitions, Beliefs, Practices," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe: The Middle Ages*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo and Stuart Clark (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 40.

⁸⁷ Chaucer's Cecilia seems fit company for Gower's women. She follows up a colloquial phrase with a direct accusation: "sooth to heere...thou hast maad a ful gret lesyng heere" (G 477-9). Her burn-the-bridges critique is not designed to persuade her judge but to embrace her martyrdom; it is also rhetorical flare from a character noted for her plain speech.

faithlessness. These women may not change their fate, but, like the beggar in *Two Pastries*, they offer a for-the-record critique of those who abused their power and relationships.⁸⁸

In *The Tale of Three Questions*, Gower's most powerful riddle master, Peronelle, uses this rhyme pair strategically to make a king listen to reason. I have already discussed how Peronelle and King Alphonse are set publicly and lexically against one another, not just during the riddle contest, but also with the *rime riche* couplets that describe them as wise. Peronelle is described in two *rime riche* couplets that note her "wordes wise" that repair relationships (1.3223-4, 3344-5). "[Y]ong and wys" Alphonse, in contrast, lacks seasoned wisdom; his wisdom is a plaything that allows him "in sondri wise" to tease ("Opposen") wise men with verbal tricks (3067, 3073-4). Because the knight Petro answers Alphonse's riddles easily, the jealous king devises three more which Petro must answer correctly or die. The king intends to establish his wisdom and Petro's folly, but in the process becomes a tyrant whom Peronelle will defeat in a battle of words.

Without threatening the king's pride, Peronelle holds the position of power by retelling and answering the three riddles while the king looks on in silence. The scene reverses expected male-female roles of who should speak or be silent, as dramatized in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, in which the Wife as narrator gives the rapist knight little direct discourse yet praises his stellar year-awaited performance before a hushed court of ladies:

To every wight comanded was silence,
And that the knyght sholde telle in audience
What thyng that worldly wommen loven best.
This knyght ne stood nat stille as doth a best,

⁸⁸ See also Book 4's *Tale of Nauplius and Ulysses*, in which Laodamia's letter is not quoted directly but the description of which is conveyed with *rime riche*: "Hou sche hath axed of the wyse, / Touchende of him in such a wise, / That thei have don hire understonde, / Towardes othre hou so it stonde" (1911-4). Rhyme comes across as one of her tools of persuasion.

But to his questioun anon answerde
With manly voys, that al the court it herde (D 1031-36)

Like Criseyde, whose lexical power serves men, the Wife pairs the knight's "manly voys" with the authority of *rime riche*. He is a front man delivering a canned answer, yet that seems good enough for the Wife, Guinivere's court, and the hag who marries him. The play on "best" hints at the beastliness of rape—the assurance that he is not a beast evokes the possibility that he is one—but Chaucer's women seem to admire show over substance and in doing so sacrifice their power for his pleasure.

Peronelle, by contrast, steals the show. She is not only described with *rime riche* but speaks it, a version of walking the walk and talking the talk, which Alphonse lacks, speaking no such couplets himself. She effortlessly cuts through the king's labyrinthine three riddles with three clarifying *rime riche* couplets. She speaks with the most rich rhymes given to any character in the *Confessio*'s tales, used here to quyte the king's three-part attack. The riddles misleadingly revolve around the language of valuation, but Peronelle's rich rhyme draws out the concealed truth, as with her answer to the second riddle:

[That] Which most is worth and most is good
And costeth lest a man to kepe,
Mi lord, if ye woll take kepe,
I seie it is humilité (3272-75)

Buttressed with *rime riche*, her answer conveys a pat, proverbial sentiment and draws on homespun yet non-negotiable wisdom, just the right verbal tactic to address a king sensitive to his intellectual supremacy. Counseling him to "take kepe" and teaching him the answer as if he did not know it, Peronelle turns the tables on her king and hints that he has issued a riddle on humility without keeping any humility for himself.

With each rich rhyme, Peronelle's instruction of her king becomes more explicit. On the third occasion she advises him,

That ye such grace and such justice

Ordeigne for mi fader hierie,
That after this, whan men it hierie,
The world therof mai speke good. (1.3318-21)

Peronelle never accuses the king of ungracious and unjust behavior, but states that the way the king acts toward her father *here* will be universally known, not if, but *when* “men it hierie.” The language is proactive—not directly focusing on what has happened, tyrannical as it might be, but what *will* happen, with real and public consequences for the king. Given such words, the king has no reasonable choice but to promote Petro publically to atone for the publically viewed tyrannical behavior. In other words, Peronelle turns the crowds against him, forcing him to react more graciously. Immediately securing her father’s promotion, she thanks the king with “wordes wise” and “in this wise” talks her way from commoner to queen (3345-6). The king earlier comments that he hypothetically would have married her if she were his equal; her father, however, is only a “bachilier” (3338). She reminds the king of his public statement, points out that she is now his peer, and, like a chess player pronouncing check-mate, she proposes a marriage he cannot refuse: “A kinges word it mot ben holde” (3369). Her phrase is an English variation of the Latin maxim, *Stet verbum regis*, in which the point, according to Thomas D. Hill, “is not simply that a king should keep his word—although that idea has some currency as well—but that when a king has made a judgment, that ‘verbum’ is final and cannot be changed, even if the king himself should wish to do so.”⁸⁹ Alphonse seems willing to marry this beautiful and brilliant woman before him, but he has no choice in the matter. Earlier in the chapter I compared Peronelle to Esther for using their feminine dress, words, and manners to manipulate an all-powerful king. The difference is that Esther manages to secure the king’s favor of the Jewish people to *combat* his own word (*stet verbum regis* applies to him as well), amply arming them against the assassination day

⁸⁹ Thomas D. Hill, “*Stet Verbum Regis*: Why Henryson’s Husbandman is Not a King,” *English Studies*, Vol. 86, No. 2, April 2005, 129.

that he mandated, while Peronelle manipulates the king's polite rejection of her hand in marriage into a contract for marriage. While her couplets are water-tight, his words are easy targets, and his role as king actually proves vulnerable to her verbal tactics, because she defeats him with her words, but his own function as the *coup de grace*.

Rime riche is only one means for a character to enrich speech, but what makes it stand out is its strategy in using sameness to speak with difference. Though most *rime riche* speakers within Chaucer's tales are rich men, Gower seems interested in diversifying these sententious voices to include peasants and women. He empowers them in the way he best understood—by giving them poetic power to make their couplets sing. Though Chaucer's pilgrims delight us for their mixed estates and unlikely camaraderie, Gower seems invested in presenting mixed voices that are not just playful but powerful and beautiful voices that match and even outdo authority. Bardus' simplicity is ultimately honored; Peronelle moves the king with her "wordes wise," and Thaïse sings "lich an angel," winning over all who hear her voice (8.1671). Gower graces peasant and female speech with *rime riche* like overtones of Arion's restorative music, to make the world a richer one by helping kings listen rather than speak.

Cues to Metamorphoses in the Tales

As an instrument that can turn against its master's hand, *rime riche* is conspicuous though not always effective. Boniface used it persuasively, though the beggar and some of the lovers do not attain their desires with it. Most characters within the tales, however, do not show such conscious rhetorical skills and do not speak with *rime riche* couplets. Rather, they are described by them, sometimes in suggestive ways that seem bound up with their stories. Just as Constance is packed off

in a ship and later rescued with worship by her new fellowship, a number of characters seem defined by the couplets that encapsulate their tales. So aptly descriptive, *rime riche* couplets offer a way of viewing the stories and characters and can prepare us for the characters' metamorphoses.

The couplet's link between form and content lets us know something is going on before we see it, much as movie music awakens our suspense. For example, when Tiresias breaks apart the mating snakes, the *rime riche* variants cue us in to the changes happening to him:

And for he hath destourbed *kinde*
And was so to nature *unkinde*,
Unkindeliche he was *transformed*,
That he which erst a man was *formed*
Into a womman was *forschape*.
That to him was an *angri* jape;
Bot for that he with *Angre* wroghte,
Hise *Angres angreliche* he boghte (3.373-80; my italics)

Metamorphosis in Ovid's poetry often seems to happen in a flash, arbitrarily. In this passage, we are prepared for it by rhyme words. The couplets explain the metamorphosis by moralizing on Tiresias' action in terms of cause and effect, acting and being acted upon in turn. He unkindly disturbed kind, and therefore his kind or nature will also be unkindly disturbed, reformed, and reshaped. The flow in rhyme words from *kinde*, *unkinde*, *transformed*, *formed*, *forschape*, *jape* animate the scene play by play. There is also something brilliant about showing the change of Tiresias' gender in *rime riche* variants: the words *kinde* and *unkinde* and *transformed* and *formed* are almost identical but the prefixes differentiate them. The prefixes clue us into Tiresias' metamorphosis, his subtle change from *man* to *womman*. It is a jape, but one that stems from the logic of the moment and verbal play. Moreover, the passage exemplifies that action and result are interlocked, just like the wordplay. He builds up the metamorphoses with repetition. These include the rare three-line

wordplay on “kinde” (*kinde, unkinde, Unkindeliche*), which explains Tiresias’ violation of nature; a three-line sound play on “transformed,” “formed,” and “forschape,” which narrates Tiresias’ punishment; and, finally, Gower concludes with a three-line wordplay underscoring Tiresias’ angry reaction. The four words that play on anger (“angri jape”; “with Angre wroghte, / His Angres angrelliche he boghte,” 378-380) contain an English and Latin wordplay on anger and *anguis*, or snake. It is as though pun and metamorphosis work together, and the sexual confusion and frustration that he has inflicted upon the snakes now become his own dilemma. Burrow notes the verbal ornament in this passage but believes such signs of mannerism have “little part in the staple style of *Confessio Amantis*,” whose “best effects” are marked with plain speech.⁹⁰ “Sometimes,” he adds, with plain speech “a whole story will come to a head in a single line.” Burrow is correct that the pronounced wordplay in this passage is not typical, but it can at least be said the *rime riche* and *rime riche* variants are a staple of Gower’s style, used to crystallize a moment and contribute to that skillful effect of bringing a whole story to a head, as it does here.

The story of Ceyx and Alcyone offers another example in which Gower uses *rime riche* to underscore metamorphosis, an important theme as evidence by the three *rime riche* variants on *forme* (*reformed / transformed*, 4.2945-6; *transforme / forme*, 4.3049-50; *forme / conforme*, 4.3109-10). However, the main couplet Gower uses to hint at the characters’ metamorphoses occurs when Genius’ describes the god of Sleep:

Upon a fethrebed alofte
 He lith with many a pilwe of doun:
 The chamber is strowed up and doun
 With swevenes many thousandfold. (4.3020-23)

⁹⁰ John Burrow, “Gower’s Poetic Styles,” *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 246-7.

As Christopher Ricks noticed, Gower juxtaposes the down pillows with a “happy adverbial carelessness” that suits the god’s dreamy world.⁹¹ His remark detects something akin to the yoking of abstract and physically oriented words that I described at the start of this essay, the coupling of the abstract direction down with tactile down feathers. *Rime riche* has a reflexive, rounded quality of words turned in upon themselves, which makes it so perfect in this portrayal of Sleep, for the couplet seems to curl in upon itself and snooze. The sleep-inducing repetition of “doun” weighs us down with the lavishly suffocating quality of Sleep’s house, and the “swevenes” or dreams float around the bed like stray feathers.

But the couplet does more than describe the sleepy god. In such cases, Gower seems to test how much language can do, how much the sound play triggers sense play. The rhyme word in this couplet casts an eerie, “downy” influence upon the story and paves the way for metamorphoses. Not long after Morpheus’s visit, Alcyone and her husband metamorphose into birds. These rhyme words trigger change in the narrative, as if the *rime riche* couplets were the blueprint for Ceyx and Alcyone’s metamorphosis. As readers familiar with the myth, we know that Alcyone and Ceyx will become birds, but the feathers in Sleep’s cave draw a connection between Sleep and the lovers, as if Sleep’s involvement in their affairs takes its toll upon them. The rhyme gives Genius a new detail to the story and a new way of explaining why birds were the chosen form.

The *doun / doun* rhyme is the only *rime riche* of its kind in the *Confessio*, which makes it seem tailor-made for Ceix and Alcyone, but as we have seen in the *schipe* couplets, even commonly occurring rhymes can have a significant bearing on the story. One of Gower’s more widely used *rime riche* couplets, with 15 instances, is the pairing of “hote” and “hote.” For example, this couplet from Pyramus and

⁹¹ Ricks, “Metamorphosis in Other Words,” 30.

Thisbe's love story combines a colloquial reference to passion with a common verb:

And he whom that sche loveth hote
Was Piramus be name hote. (3.1375-76)

Pyramus is not just *hote*, or called, Pyramus by name; he is attractive, *hot* and hotly desired. This play on *hote* also complements the wordplay inherent in Pyramus's name, for "pyr" comes from the word fire in Greek. He literally *is* "be name hote", or hot by name.⁹² The word has a wild, reckless flavor, which makes sense in Pyramus's story, because he will commit suicide and not learn the truth about Thisbe's fate.

Readers already know how the story will end, but the play on *hote* casts a vernacular spin on a classical tale, as if that word determines Pyramus's character and fate.

Genius sometimes uses the verbs *clepen* or *hihte* to introduce the names of the characters, but *hote* conveys a passionate feeling that is powerful but often destructive.⁹³

Genius introduces several tragic lovers' names in this way, including Dido: "Dido she was hote; / Which loveth Eneas so hote" (4.87-8). The heat in this couplet echoes the terrible fire so memorably captured by Ovid, in a slightly different game of meaningful repetition:

arserat Aeneae Dido miserabilis igne,
arserat exstructis in sua fata rogis (Ovid, *Fasti* 3.545-6)

Poor Dido had burned with the fire of love for Aeneas; she had burned, too, on a pyre built for her doom.⁹⁴

In the first line, Dido burns with tragic passion, but the repetition of "arserat"

⁹² Fred Ahl, *Metaformations: Soundplay and Wordplay in Ovid and Other Classical Poets* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985), 172. Gower would have known that "pyr" means fire, based on his classical learning and his understanding of the word "Pirumance" (CA 6.1298).

⁹³ For some examples randomly chosen from Book 4 alone, *clepen* is used for Ydelnesse and Io (4.1087; 4.3319-20). *Hihte* is used to introduce Jephthah (4.1507). At other times, Gower simply uses the verb *to be*: "Hire name was Rosiphelee" (4.1249). Gower had many choices in such terms, and when he wished, he also spelled *hot* in the modern fashion, e.g., "if love be to hot" (4.2670) and "anon fot hot" (4.3350).

⁹⁴ Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. by James George Frazer (London: Loeb Classical Library, William Heinemann Ltd., 1931), 3.545-6.

underscores her literal burning. The effect is zeugma: she burns with love and burns on the pyre. The verb “burn” is already a loaded word begging for such play, but when Gower appropriates Ovid’s wordplay on fire, he instead puns with the hitherto innocuous verb “hote” and builds on its meanings to construct her tragic love story. It is more subtle punning, and unlike Ovid’s couplet, Genius’s *rime riche* couplets are not quite as self-contained in their semantic reach. We have to consider the story in its entirety to see how the couplet rhyme plays itself out. The naming of Dido and of her hot passion contains wordplay that becomes more meaningful in the context of her final fate on the pyre, glossed over by Genius but known to Gower’s audience. By such examples Genius warns Amans that passion can lead to tragedy. Pyramus and Dido may be unaware of the *rime riche* universe they live in, but the couplet will bear its consequences as the story unfolds.⁹⁵

With its play on similarity and difference, *rime riche* is ideal for conveying the fine line that can sometimes exist between love and hate, bliss and tragedy, virtue and vice, beasts and men, as in the tale of Poliphemus, a tale I have already discussed in the Introduction. Poliphemus’ metamorphosis resembles Dido’s ardor in that the characters embody the puns describing them. When the lovesick Poliphemus spies on the courting lovers, one word contains the blueprint for his metamorphosis:

His herte mai it nocht forbere
That he ne roreth lich a Bere (2.159-60)

A man who cannot “forbere” acts like a “bere”—and barely remains human in the process. The simile is a consequence, the result of the word “forbere” unfolding its

⁹⁵ For another example, see Phebus, the hot-tempered sun who kills his unfaithful lover (4.979-80, 3.783-817). Considering the violence in some of these love stories, it is perhaps intentional that Genius introduces personified Wrath with a similar *rime riche* couplet: “Wrathe is hote, / Which hath hise wordes ay so hote” (3.21-2). Like an-ill starred lover, Wrath burns and makes others “fyred” up around him (3.24). Both Wrath and love are hot by nature, and Genius skillfully connects these two conflagrations by emphasizing the *ire* in *fyre* (3.15-6). When these lovers are “fyred up”, Dido kills herself and Phebus kills Cornide.

meanings in the story. Initially, Gower presents Poliphemus as a would-be lover who patiently waits upon his beloved. But when Poliphemus finally catches Acis and Galatea together, he roars like an animal and crushes Acis in a landslide. In the Introduction I quoted C. S. Lewis' observation that only late in the tale does Gower inform readers, "in a most casual parenthesis," that Poliphemus is a giant.⁹⁶ In that earlier chapter I argued for Gower's humanitarian delay of information, allowing us to reimagine the Poliphemus myth and perceive the man before we meet the monster. Here, however, I wish to point out that rhyme serves as a parenthesis. It walks the fine line between man and monster: forbearance is a revered human virtue, a roaring bear is purely bestial. Gower yokes those concepts to chronicle Poliphemus' decline into bestial rage that will take away his inhibitions, his forbearance, leaving nothing but the animal self. Escaping codes of human conduct allow him to do what he wants, but at the cost of his humanity.⁹⁷

The *forbere / bere* couplet happens again later in the poem, but this time a character really becomes a bear, when Juno punishes Callisto for being raped by Jupiter. It is a typical Ovidian metamorphosis in which the woman loses her humanity through no fault of her own. In Gower's retelling, her metamorphosis slowly unfolds.

⁹⁶ Lewis, *The Allegory of Love*, 209.

⁹⁷ A similar pun encapsulates Tereus' animal passion. Philomela upbraids him for his lack of forbearance:

O mor cruel than eny beste,
 Hou hast thou holden thi beheste
 Which thou unto my Soster madest? (5.5677-9)

The couplet, besides pointing out the anagrammatic connection between *beste* and *beheste*, is reminiscent of *rime riche*, not a perfect aural match but suggestive of it, especially since "h" is a silent letter when found at the beginning of words and after *w*, as Kökeritz has argued for Chaucer's poetry, though Ito himself was unsure if these rules would apply to Gower's poetry (Kökeritz, 946; Ito, 230). There is an epigrammatic moralizing to Philomela's words: a man who cannot keep his *beheste* is nothing but a *beste*. *Beste* was a loaded word for Gower, for it contains its antonym within itself, as Paulina was to discover. In virtue she was the "beste" of women, but her sexual relations with Mundus, which were supposed to elevate her as the mother of a semi-divine child, debased her until she sees herself as "non other than a beste" (1.768, 976). *Rime riche* and puns are both ways to explore this similarity and difference within language and ways to ask what this may mean for the characters in the tales.

Diana dismisses Callisto as a “foule beste” (5.6275), and this contemptuous name-calling becomes a physical reality when Juno tells Callisto her plans to change the girl’s face and shape:

“In such a wise I schal deface,
That every man thee schal forbere.”
With that the liknesse of a bere
Sche tok and was forschape anon. (5.6308-11)

Defaced, Callisto is a blank page for Juno’s punishment, to make men “forbere” her. A “foule beste,” blanked out and shunned by her companions, Callisto is already losing her humanity, and so dehumanized, she may as well really be a beast. As if the word “forbere” hints at what shape the girl should take, Juno takes her cue and turns Callisto into a bear. Then the actual reference to “forschaping” confirms this metamorphosis after it has happened.

Callisto is a victim of divine caprice, both of Jupiter’s embrace and Juno’s revenge. Her metamorphosis is sexist and arbitrary, characteristics of Ovidian metamorphosis. With moralizations and other additions, Gower’s adaptations try to amend the cruelty and unfairness in Ovid’s text. However, although Gower’s *rime riche* couplets explain the metamorphoses to some degree, they too reflect an arbitrary, unfair force on human lives. In Gower’s retelling, rhyme influences Juno’s thoughts and paves the way for the ursine transformation. Although the couplet yokes words that bear no relationship with each other except that they rhyme *forbere* and *bere*, Gower respects this linguistic tie and gives words their influence over the story. Once begun, the couplet must be fulfilled, and the suggestive nature of rhyme forces a predictable and unjust conclusion: a woman must become a bear because a man could not otherwise forbear her beauty.

Wordplay takes precedence over *fair* play in the epilogue to Callisto’s tale, after Callisto and her son meet with nearly fatal misunderstanding. Their encounter is

phrased with a *rime riche* variant:

Whan sche under the wodesschawe
Hire child behield, sche was so glad,
That sche with bothe hire armes sprad,
As thogh sche were in *wommanhiede*,
Toward him cam, and tok non *hiede*
Of that he bar a bowe bent. (5.6324-9; my italics)

Seeing her-long lost son, Callisto rushes forward with maternal affection, her arms wide open. The problem is that she is still in bear-shape and her son, aptly named Archas, is an archer. Having no way of knowing his danger of committing matricide, Archas takes aim at a “beste wyld,” heedless of her true *wommanhiede*, just as she is heedless of his bent bow (6333). This would have been a nice opportunity for Jupiter to restore the mother’s proper form after sixteen long years in ursine shape and let her be reunited with her child and enjoy that embrace she was willing to die for. Instead, Jupiter stellifies them. The grand gesture completely misses the point of giving back to this mother and son the fundamental human bond that the gods never allowed them, and now Jupiter robs Archas of his humanity as well. Eternally frozen in the sky, now they are *both* bears, astral monuments to Jupiter’s lack of forbearance. Perhaps a little bothered by the extent of the transformations taking place, Genius glosses over the second metamorphosis, assuring us that Jupiter intervenes and saves the pair, yet stellification is not salvation. Callisto’s story exemplifies the dark side of *rime riche* and verbal power. Rhyme explains the divine logic behind the metamorphosis without assuaging our moral indignation, and this in turn brings us back to Amans’ *rime riche* cluster in Book 5 and Dubrow’s argument that literary form sometimes aestheticizes social injustice. Even as we understand and even enjoy the couplet’s play with form and content, Callisto’s form is being abused. The *rime riche*, then, while giving us a glimpse into Juno’s logic, is perhaps a guilty pleasure, at least until we get to the couplet that underscores Callisto’s *wommanhiede*. With that intense, maternal portrait

of Callisto with open arms, Genius is taking heed of the woman within the bear. The vivid writing and vague conclusion of Callisto's fate suggest Genius' uneasiness with Ovid's text, and *rime riche* does not spirit away that discomfort. Rather, the *hiede / womanhiede* couplet seems to be a way to mull over these problems.

I wish to look at one last and more morally satisfying metamorphosis, this time from man to animal and, unlike Poliphemus and Callisto, back again to a human shape. In the story of Nebuchadnezzar, whose boasting steals from God's glory, God will "take a mannes herte aweie / And sette there a bestial" (1.2912).

Nebuchadnezzar's metamorphosis is prophesied in similar *rime riche* terms as we have seen above:

And [the tree root, symbolizing the king] schal no mannes herte bere,
Bot every lust he schal forbere
Of man, and lich an oxe his mete
Of gras he schal pouchace and ete,
Til that the water of the hevene
Have waisshen him be times sevene . . . (1.2841-2846)

Because of Nebuchadnezzar's pride, he loses his kingdom and also something even more fundamental, his "herte" or human nature. The prophecy comes true, and Nebuchadnezzar experiences the utmost degradation. Yet at the end of the story, in which Nebuchadnezzar prays to God for mercy, a *rime riche* couplet solidifies his final redemption, so that Nebuchadnezzar is forgiven

And was reformed to the regne
In which that he was wont to regne. (1.3035-6)

This is a couplet with a simple grammatical play on the noun and verb of the word "regne": he regains the reign that he once reigned. But the word resonates with Nebuchadnezzar's previous metamorphosis from man into beast in another *rime riche* on *regne* (2909-2910). It occurs in a longer passage (2905-2925) that declares he will lose his reign and find himself thrust outside, where "The weder schal upon thee

reine” and instead of reigning, he will “be bereined” (2925, 2915). The passage encapsulates Nebuchadnezzar’s fall in a pun: he moves from his royal reign to the cold and the *rain*. Once Nebuchadnezzar humbles his outlook and “braieth” penitent prayers, he regains his sanity and speech and can reign once more (3027). The *rime riche* couplet and homonym are reversible in this tale of pride and redemption, bringing the bedraggled king out of the elements and back home. Nebuchadnezzar’s rise and fall center around the same word, a word that comes full circle and reveals the man’s essence, much like Constance’s *schipe*. But unlike Juno’s unjust transformation of Callisto, who was simply in the wrong place at the wrong time, God punishes Nebuchadnezzar for falling short of his duty and teaches Nebuchadnezzar to live up to that word, “reign”; if he wants the noun, his realm, he must properly act out the verb and reign as befits a godly ruler. Moreover, the punishment is also the therapy: the rain will chastise and cleanse him, for after seven years in the rain, he will regain his mind and at last be ready to rule his mind and his kingdom.

In conclusion, Gower shows much attention to and respect for everyday language; he writes “With rude wordis and with pleyne” (8.3122). Gower’s posture of simplicity suggests a seamless, direct quality to language. He nonetheless is fascinated by language’s cumulative effect. When strung together and harnessed in *rime riche*, these everyday words build on one another and make meanings that were not there before. Form and content seem to work on each other, until puns in the text find their physical equivalent in moments of change, even in punning metamorphoses, within the tales. Homespun phrasing and simple words like *schipe* and *bere* find their way into Gower’s poem, where there they are metamorphosed into something more, something that can save a damsel or start an avalanche. *Rime riche* paradoxically opens and closes mental doors at the same time. Its shared form and diverse content

open up new connections between words, create new ties, new associations, new modes toward interpretation. The sameness of the words' forms binds their diverse meanings together, engaging in a metamorphic process in miniature, in which the yoked words are more complex taken together than they were taken separately.

That said, each *rime riche* couplet artfully closes in on itself. Each couplet is an island, a sphere of sense, and a witty whole. The yoking seems inevitable, the only possible connection of words and ideas. Debra Fried pays a similar compliment to Pope's most famous rhyme,

Here files of pins extend their shining rows
Puffs, powders, patches, Bibles, Billet-doux.

Pope's rhyme is as polished, compact, and elegant as one of the dainty items on Belinda's dressing table. Fried comments, "That billet-doux could hardly be bettered; it fits to the letter; as Pope's couplet-closing rhymes often make us feel, for that slot in the line and in the couplet and in the poem, it's just the ticket."⁹⁸ Gower's couplets, I believe, are also just the ticket, though they work in an entirely different way. There is no "slot" of just the right size and shape, created where the dense flow of sense allows a precise space for a specific rhyme word, *le mot juste*. Gower takes the opposite approach. He gives his rhyme words as much elbow room as they require and lets them drive the couplet with authoritative heft. They gain inevitability and power because such rhymes are not what Fried calls the "echo to the sense" but the instigator of it.⁹⁹ Pope's strength resides in the sparkling array on Belinda's table, with every item—cosmetic and lexical—placed just so. As a visual poet with tactile elements to his writing, Gower is more focused on a few things seem intimately, even if briefly, with the intensity of a well-timed snap-shot, rather than displaying anything like Pope's nimble plentitude.

⁹⁸ Fried, "Rhyme Puns," 89.

⁹⁹ Fried, "Rhyme Puns," 84.

Burrow notes an example of Gower's attention to the physical in the tale of Constance, in the way he describes the murderous banquet:

The Dissh forthwith the Coppe and al
Bebled thei weren overal. (2.699-700)

Burrow notes that Gower describes a scene of devastation with a focus on the minute: “‘The Dissh’ and ‘the Coppe’ stand, of course, for numerous items of the same sort . . . this frequent trick of style directs singulars or particulars toward general categories to which they belong, in keeping with the poem’s overall mode of meaning, literal exemplification.”¹⁰⁰ For Gower, simple objects are weighted, almost symbolic and iconic. There is sacrilege in harming these objects, suggestively invested with scriptural overtones of ‘The Bread and the Cup’ of the Last Supper. So, too, if Gower were rewriting Pope’s lines, there would be space to mull over the particulars of the dressing table, to give weight to an object or two resting upon it. In such a way the perfect rhyme emerges in his poetry because he chooses the word that captures the moment and lets everything else respond to the rhyme’s gravitational pull, the abstract wrapping itself around the concrete and *vice versa* in a moment of reciprocal creation.

It is this gravitational force that makes these couplets feel so inevitable. With a single word they seem to capture the essence of a character’s story, for their linguistic metamorphoses are connected to metamorphosis and change within the stories they narrate. This interconnectedness of word, couplet, and story explains why the characters within the tales draw upon *rime riche*, to funnel that power for their own purposes, sometimes giving the men and women who speak them a metamorphic power and a voice.

Rime riche, then, is aurally registered on some level by characters existing in Gower’s fictional space, most notably by Genius and Amans, in a couplet war

¹⁰⁰ Burrow, “Gower’s Poetic Styles,” 248.

centered on changes in Amans' life and heart. The *rime riche*-laced dialogue between Genius and Amans reveals their self-conscious knowledge of what words can do. As they block each other's moves and redirect and revise each other's statements, both men are eager to have language's power on their side. *Rime riche* is an apt tool for debate because its meaning compacted in a small space, but all of this suggests that Amans is highly trained and attuned to language. His metamorphosis from lover to author of "a bok for Engelondes sake" (Prol. 24; see also 8.3108) is not as random as it initially seems, then, for the *rime riche* he has been using all along is one clue to who he really is, a man with a passion for building with words and watching the metamorphoses that come from them. Venus reminds him that he is a writer (8.2926-7) and redirects his attention to that productive end. At the conclusion of Book 8 he does not become someone else but rather becomes more fully himself.

The "verbal felicities" so rightly praised by Ricks are Gower's Muses, guiding him to fresh questions, answers, and inspiration.¹⁰¹ That Gower uses hundreds of these couplets in the *Confessio* underscores his fascination for that metamorphic process as a conversation, a complex process of shading and conflating. His *rime riche* serves him as a means to explore places where words so often fail, a means to make meaning, a way to listen closely, at once to hear similarity and difference and to hear the wholeness, the rightness, in the sound.

¹⁰¹ Ricks, "Metamorphosis in Other Words," 25.

Chapter Two

Decapitation in a Word: Syllabic Play and Metamorphosis in Gower's Vox Clamantis

The reason why there is a *one* in *throne*
Is that a monarch has to reign alone.
—Richard Wilbur, from *The Pig in the Spigot*¹⁰²

The first book of John Gower's *Vox Clamantis*, an account of the Rebellion of 1381 written shortly after the event, is sometimes called the literary portion of his otherwise didactic poem about problems in society. But if Book 1 is "literary," it is strange literature. Rather than offering a factual, moment-by-moment account of the rebellion, Gower presents what Eve Salisbury playfully calls a "poetic Frankenstein," in which peasants in the form of domestic animals morph into monsters.¹⁰³ Framed like nothing so much as a B-type horror flick, the poem recounts how asses, oxen, dogs, cats, geese, and other animals turn nasty; they acquire horns, teeth, and various other fearsome appendages and then prey upon defenseless people.

Later on in the book, Gower offers more historical information and employs more expected literary models: he compares the fall of London (New Troy) to the fall of Troy and the floundering ship of state. Gower foregrounds these more conventional descriptions, however, with stomping hooves, foaming jaws, a flame-breathing boar, and other such displays of beastly behavior for a full seven chapters before he even mentions Wat Tyler and the specific acts of mob violence committed. By describing

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¹⁰² Wilbur, *Collected Poems*, 577.

¹⁰³ See Eve Salisbury, "Remembering Origins: Gower's Monstrous Body Poetic", in *Re-Visioning Gower*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1998), 160. Salisbury uses Jeffery Jerome Cohen's monster theory to explore the hybrid nature of the metamorphosed rebels. I agree that their hybrid identity is a feature Gower emphasizes, and I try to show Gower's indebtedness to the tradition of grammatical play in his depiction of these hybrid forms.

the rebellion in terms of a nightmarish beast epic, Gower uses metamorphoses to offer a uniquely powerful way to represent the unnaturalness of rebellion. This mode of writing has alienated critics who resent Gower's beastly metamorphoses. A representative reaction is that of David Aers, who argues that Gower robs the rebels of their voices to underscore their inferiority as inarticulate beasts.¹⁰⁴ While such readings are vital in examining Gower's politics and whether his works are ethically coherent, a deeper understanding of Gower's literary technique is necessary to judge just how voiceless these rebels actually are. Gower, in fact, attributes extraordinary power to them—the power to flip the social hierarchy and the power to transform their bodies. More to the point, the rebels' powers are poetic, uncannily similar to the Latin riddle tradition of syllabic play that Gower himself employs. Gower writes about monstrous metamorphoses not to take away the rebels' voice but to explore its rival, literary power.

Dissected Names

Before describing this Latin tradition, I wish to touch briefly on the rebels' agency; though initially molded by their superiors for determined roles, they ultimately mold themselves. Gower's peasants change not once but twice, which allows Gower to contrast a more conventional metamorphosis with the monstrous one that is arguably the main focus of the book. The first time is a simple, complete change from man to beast, not unlike the metamorphoses Gower later adapts from Ovid, as, for example, in his rendering of Acteon in the first book of his *Confessio*

¹⁰⁴ David Aers, "'Vox Populi' and the Literature of 1381," in *The Cambridge History of Medieval Literature*, ed. D. Wallace (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), ch. 16. See also Aers, "Reflections on Gower as 'Sapiens in Ethics and Politics,'" in *Re-Visioning Gower*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Ashville, NC: Pegasus Press: 1998), 188.

Amantis. As in so many other Ovidian tales, divine power inflicts change upon a powerless victim, often (at least in Gower) with a twisted logic guiding the metamorphoses. We first meet Acteon as a hunter, and his “grete Hornes” for hunting prepare us for the horns on his head (1.343).¹⁰⁵ In the *Vox*, too, divine power curses the peasants (“Ecce dei subito malediccio fulsit in illos” [behold, the curse of God suddenly flashed upon them]) with a shape deemed appropriate for their lowly social status (1.175).¹⁰⁶ They become beasts of burden.

Yet these passively endured metamorphoses, usually the conclusion of an Ovidian tale, only set the stage for Gower’s next, more unusual type of metamorphosis, from domestic beasts to man-killing beasts. God’s curse made their shapes “wild” or perhaps just beastly (“formas fecerat esse feras” [it had made them into wild beasts]), but now they will become truly *ferae*, truly wild and untamable (I.176). More than a simple change from one form to another or even a fusion of bodies, like the fusion of man and serpent in Canto XXV of Dante’s *Inferno* or Ovid’s story of Hermaphroditus (*Met.* 4.285-397), stories in which a higher power causes bodies to meld together, the rebels seek out and enact their own metamorphoses as a way of shaping more powerful bodies that will in turn shape a new social hierarchy.

This radically different metamorphosis is modeled less after Ovid than after a tradition of Latin grammatical play. As John Alford notes, grammar in the medieval period was not only a means of structuring language but a mirror of natural and even divine order.¹⁰⁷ The aspect of grammar that articulates Gower’s metamorphoses in the

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion of the *cornua* in Ovid rendered as hunting horns in Gower’s tale, see Winthrop Wetherbee, “Latin Structure and Vernacular Space: Gower, Chaucer, and the Boethian Tradition”, *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Victoria, BC: University of Victoria, 1991), 26-27.

¹⁰⁶ *Complete Works IV: The Latin Works*, ed. Macaulay. All translations of the *Vox Clamantis* are by Eric W. Stockton, *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962).

¹⁰⁷ John A. Alford, “The Grammatical Metaphor: A Survey of Its Use in the Middle Ages,” *Speculum*, Vol. 57, No. 4 (Oct., 1982), 728-760. See also Jean Leclercq, *The Love of Learning and the Desire for God: A Study of Monastic Culture*, trans. Catherine Misrahi (New York: Fordham University Press,

Vox Clamantis is what I would call syllabic play, which uses metaphors of the body to describe words. Gower draws from linguistic games by Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Alan of Lille, and the Oxford Latin riddle tradition as elaborated in rhetorical treatises like the 14th century *Secretum philosophorum*. Functioning as a guidebook, the *Secretum* decodes riddles, many of which operate by syllabic play (“per sillabas”), by which words are treated as bodies with physical parts made up of syllables.¹⁰⁸ These syllables can themselves be words, which can then be translated in various forms of bilingual or trilingual wordplay (“diviti duro,” for example, signifies “rich-hard,” or Richard), or they can be meaningless components in themselves but capable of being arranged for the riddle’s solution.¹⁰⁹ The *Secretum* defines this latter form as follows:

Item alio modo variatur per sillabas et hoc quando sillabe per se sumpte nihil significant, et tunc recurritur ad aliam dictionem habentem talem sillabam in se, et tunc loco illius sillabe accipitur capud illius dictionis, si ista sillaba fuerit principium (scilicet dictionis), vel cauda, si fuerit finis, vel venter, si fuerit medium. Ut hic:
Si vertas capud bachi caudamque sibille,
Invenies pro quo facies spiramina mille.¹¹⁰

Also in another way it is varied through syllables, and this is when syllables mean nothing taken in themselves, and in that case one can revert to another word having such a syllable in itself, and then in the place of the syllable is put the head of that word, if that syllable was the top (that is, of the word), or the tail, if it was the end, or the stomach, if it was the middle. For example,
If you turn the head of bachus and the tail of sibilla
You will find out for whom you would make a thousand sighs. (Trans. Galloway)

Andrew Galloway explains that the reader may be sighing for the murder of Abel (*ba* in *bachi* becomes *ab*, *le* in *sibille* becomes *el*), or that the solution may be Heloise

1982), who calls grammar and spirituality “the two essential components” of medieval monastic culture (11).

¹⁰⁸ Andrew Galloway, “The Rhetoric of Riddling in Late-Medieval England: The ‘Oxford’ Riddles, the *Secretum philosophorum*, and the Riddles in *Piers Plowman*,” *Speculum*, January 1995, vol. 70, no. 1, 74. There is as yet no edition of the *Secretum philosophorum*. All quotations are from Galloway’s transcriptions.

¹⁰⁹ Galloway, “Rhetoric of Riddling,” 75.

¹¹⁰ Galloway, “Rhetoric of Riddling,” 75-6.

sighing for Abelard. A third possibility may be the sighs of fallen man due to his separation from God, *ab El*; its message may be that men intoxicated (with a head-over-heels Bacchus?) with sin turn away from God and unfallen language (“El” and “sibille”). A more tenuous possibility is that Bacchus may be a derivative from the Hebrew *Bacho* or *Beth*, found in the Vulgate Book of Lamentations, written in acrostics of twenty-two verses for the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. It is intriguing to consider that the wordplay in Lamentations hinted at in this Oxford riddle may bear upon the notion of a linguistic and of decadent times in which God’s people sigh for their sins and separation from their Lord. Though the answer cannot be precisely given, the Abel riddle exemplifies the *Secretum*’s use as a guidebook, for the syllabic play is overtly rendered by playing with the syllables in the word “syllable.” Syllables need not always be reversed or ‘turned’; they can be used as building blocks to add or subtract, as in the riddle in which a crow, *cornix*, becomes white if its heart (or rather its head) is removed (*tollatur*)—not the bird’s actual heart or head but its syllabic head, *cor* or “heart.”¹¹¹ *Cornix* decapitated is as white as snow (*nix*). To reiterate, a word’s first syllable resembles its head, the last its feet. These parts, in turn, can be taken apart and reassembled, with some parts cropped, others added, according to riddling rhetoric.

The *Secretum* positions this play as verbal trickery, yet it is trickery of the most technical kind. It seems no coincidence that riddles appear in English manuscripts saturated with other technical, abstruse fields, such as alchemy, astrology, geomancy, geometry, medicine, and mathematics.¹¹² One such compilation is the early 15th

¹¹¹ “*Cornix est alba sic cor tollatur ab illa.*” See Galloway, who remarks “The solution to the riddle again depends on dividing the word into its ‘members,’ in this case the ‘heart’ *cor*, which is removed to leave *nix*” (75). To this I would add that *cor*, heart, is also functioning as a ‘head’ for its placement as the first syllable, as discussed in this same section of the *Secretum*; the riddle and pun misdirect readers in this confusion of literal and metaphoric body parts. See also the second section of Galloway’s article for graphic riddles on *cor*.

¹¹² Galloway, “Rhetoric of Riddling,” 71-72.

century manuscript Sloane 513, owned by the monk of Buckfast Richard Dove, who probably compiled his text while at Oxford.¹¹³ Such a constellation of studies would almost certainly have appealed to Gower, whose interest in astronomy and alchemy have already been examined in previous chapters; these sciences serve as models linked to his poetic project of harmony achieved through the ordered division of language. Just as Gower's zodiacal stars in Book 7 of the *Confessio* can do double-duty as the head of one constellation and the tail of another sign, so, too, in syllabic play, parts of words can be reapplied to other words.¹¹⁴ Many other medieval readers, more skeptical of astrology and the like would categorize syllabic play as chicanery. Indeed, the *Secretum* takes such a position in promising readers to help unravel the deceptions of riddles as mere tricks that require decoding strategies. Moreover, in its section on rhetoric, the *Secretum* goes on to divulge the secrets of knife tricks.¹¹⁵ This odd pairing of syllabic games and knife tricks may make sense: it is the manner of cutting words by which their rhetorical power is harnessed.

Geoffrey of Vinsauf described such riddles as *cautelae* (“tricks”) and, as Galloway puts it, Geoffrey “specifically condemns *dura et obscura* transformations of meaning,” yet he too has his share of knife tricks in the form of syllabic play.¹¹⁶ One such riddle occurs in the opening lines of his *Poetria Nova*, in a dedication to Pope Innocent III that superficially lauds him even as Geoffrey literally cuts his name apart:

Papa stupor mundi, si dixero Papa Nocenti,
Acephatum nomen tribuam; sed, si caput addam,
Hostis erit metri.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ Galloway, “Rhetoric of Riddling,” 82.

¹¹⁴ See Chapter Five for the treatment of the zodiac.

¹¹⁵ Galloway, “Rhetoric of Riddling,” 73.

¹¹⁶ Galloway, “Rhetoric of Riddling,” 79.

¹¹⁷ Geoffrey of Vinsauf, *Poetria Nova*, 1-3, in *Les Arts poétiques du XIIIe et du XIIIe siècle*, ed. Edmond Faral, (Paris: Librairie Honoré Champion, 1962).

Holy Father, wonder of the world, if I say Pope Nocent I shall give you a name without a head; but if I add the head, your name will be at odds with the metre.¹¹⁸

Geoffrey calls the Pope the opposite of his name and thereby surrounds Innocent's character in ambiguity where none would have otherwise existed. As he discusses his poetic dilemma of why Innocent cannot be innocent and is nocent by implication, he explains it as a matter of prosodic rules: The name's "head" or prefix does not fit the meter. In another sense, the head does not fit the "feet," a term which commonly signifies a line's metrical units. Poets have played with this pedal metaphor before. For example, in the opening to his *Amores* Ovid remarks that he had intended to compose an epic of war, not of love, but Cupid snipped a foot from every other line, thereby transforming his hexameters into elegaic couplets, a lighter meter more suited to love poetry than to an epic.¹¹⁹ In the context of Geoffrey's syllabic play, however, we are reminded that feet also signify the end of a word. Thus, Geoffrey portrays Innocent's name as something not only at odds with the meter, but within itself and its parts. Innocent is supposed to be the head of the Church, but seemingly he is no real head at all. Because the syllabic head clashes with the metric feet, the head must be lopped off, the name rendered "Nocent." Despite subsequent hyperbolic praise of the Pope's unparalleled eloquence and virtues surpassing the Church Fathers and Apostles, the initial wordplay questions the Pope's image and suggests that his name

¹¹⁸ *Poetria Nova of Geoffrey of Vinsauf*, trans. Margaret F. Nims (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1967).

¹¹⁹ See the opening lines from Ovid's *Amores*, (ed. E. J. Kennedy, Oxford Classical Texts [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961]):

Arma graui numero uiolentaque bella parabam
edere, materia conueniente modis.
par erat inferior uersus; risisse Cupido
dicitur atque unum surripuisse pedem.

Arms, warfare, violence—I was winding up to produce a
Regular epic, with verse-form to match—
Hexameters, naturally. But Cupid (they say) with a snicker
Lopped off one foot from each alternate line.

Ovid, *The Amores*, in *The Erotic Poems*, trans. Peter Green (London: Penguin, 1982).

and his innocence are unstable and even corrupt. Even if a reader is not willing to interpret this passage as a satiric complement to his overly effusive praise in the same opening, it seems clear that, in the words of Alexandre Leupin, that Geoffrey “transforms the pope/dedicatee into a pawn of his own poetic game,” snipping and rearranging his name at will in a gust of “poetic self-celebration.”¹²⁰

The notion that a word has a *caput* that can be *de-capitated* to suit metrical requirements carries satirical potential, which Gower experiments with throughout the *Vox Clamantis*. He plays syllabic games with the head and feet of words and uses them as signs of corruption, particularly of the Church. Whereas Geoffrey’s game with Pope Innocent’s name suggests nocent activity but does not overtly condemn the Pope for wrongdoing, Gower flings around such name-games as open accusations, nor does he use the meter as an excuse to piece apart words. Instead of meter, a man’s morality is the foundation upon which his name stands or falls. Modeling syllabic play after Geoffrey’s name-game with Pope Innocent, he questions the clemency of Clement VII, the pope of Avignon:

Sic differt Clemens nunc a clemente vocatus,
Errat et Acephalo nomine nomen habens. (3.955-56)

So the one now called Clement is far from being clement, and he is wrong in keeping this name, for his name lacks a prefix.

To Gower, Clement’s name lacks the head (“Acephalo”), “In,” for “Inclement.” In the lines before this passage, he writes that in Biblical times Peter cut off a man’s ear, which Christ immediately healed, but in this day Clement chops off the whole head of his enemies, so that no healing is possible. In this way Clement, says Gower, thinks he outdoes Peter in authority. Gower, however, accuses Clement of decapitating

¹²⁰ Alexandre Leupin, “Absolute Reflexivity: Geoffroi de Vinsauf,” in *Medieval Texts and Contemporary Readers*, ed. Laurie A. Finke and Martin B. Schichtman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987), 135; reprinted as Chapter One in *Barbarolexis*, trans. Kate M. Cooper (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1989).

others out of cruelty, and with this additional name-game he reveals how Clement decapitates his true name to conceal his bloodthirsty lust for power.

In a similar manner, he criticizes monks for their gluttony:

Fit modo curtata monachorum regula prima,
Est nam re dempta, sic manet ipsa gula (4.127-8)

The original rule for monks has now become curtailed, for *re* has been subtracted from *regula* so that only *gula* is left.

Not wanting to live with strict “regula,” these monks, in a sense, decapitate the unwanted word and live with “gula,” gluttony, also signifying the throat and hence appetite. Thus, Gower criticizes men whose lifestyles show a chasm between the words that should define them and the monstrous reality. By turning the same words against their abusers and letting these words reveal the truth, Gower uses not a *vox clamantis* but a voice that cunningly cuts at the objects of his satire. This nesting of *gula* in *regula* is an essential mode of forming semantic connections through the division of words into their core parts. Gower alludes to the *regula* wordplay again in Book 6 of the *Confessio Amantis*, when he describes gluttony:

This vice, which so out of rule
Hath sette ous alle, is cleped Gule (CA 6.9-10)

Gule as “gluttony” is not an English word, though readily accessible to a Latin and French speaking audience; indeed, Gower enumerates each “file de Gule” in his *Mirour de l’Omme*.¹²¹ Rhyming rule and *gule* is a less pronounced pairing of *regula* with its component *gula*, again to underscore the friction between the two words. The sound play gestures at this semantic tension, but the Latin play underscores the tension violently: *regula* is literally decapitated to bring out the pun in the pairing. A word that contains its opposite is reduced to that common denominator.

¹²¹ See the header before 7789 and throughout the section for references to *Gule*.

Gower's sense of social criticism phrased in syllabic play owes a debt to Alan of Lille, whose *De Planctu Naturae* opens with a play on grammatical terms used to condemn sexual misconduct. Using a tradition play on active and passive verbs, Alan describes homosexual love as an unraveling of language, its laws violated in the flipped gender of syllables gone wrong: men become women—"illos" become "illas" (5)—in their illicit love; men as formerly active verbs become passive; men lose their manly meter of a long syllable followed by two short ones, the *pes dactilicus*, called such for its phallic resemblance (31); this passive passion "devirat . . . viros" (6), a phrase with syllabic play, adding an emasculating prefix or head to the verb to show that this love unmans man.¹²² Alan rages with moral indignation at the "Gramatice leges" (20) broken by human behavior. For him, the same laws govern language and conduct.

Because Geoffrey, Alan, and Gower all draw from a rich tradition in which grammar serves as a metaphor and thereby becomes a means to perceive other systems through the lens of language and linguistic structure, it is not too surprising that these authors begin their very different poems with this emphasis on syllabic play.¹²³ The difference is that Gower does not open his *Vox Clamantis* to quibble over a Pope's morality or scorn the conduct of his contemporaries, but instead he adapts syllabic play to invites reader to a game of decoding his name:

Scribentis nomen si queras, ecce loquela
 Sub tribus implicita versibus inde latet.
 Primos sume pedes Godefridi desque Iohanni,
 Principiumque sui Wallia iugat eis:
 Ter caput amittens det cetera membra, que tali

¹²² Alanus of Lille, *De Planctu Naturae*, ed. N. M. Häring, *Studi Medievali*, terza serie, 19.2 (1978), 797-879. The translation is by James Sheridan, *The Plaint of Nature* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1980). See the discussion in Jan Ziolkowski, *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Medieval Academy of America, 1985), esp. 23-27; Leupin, *Barbarolexis*, 60ff.; and Alford, 732ff. For the reference to the dactylic foot and Matthew of Vendôme, see Sheridan, 70.

¹²³ For the tradition of the grammatical metaphor, see Alford, "The Grammatical Metaphor," 728-60.

Carmine compositi nominis ordo patet. (Prol. 19-24)

If you should ask the name of the writer, look, the word lies hidden and entangled within three verses about it. Take the first feet from “Godfrey” and add them to “John,” and let “Wales” join its initial to them. Leaving off its head, let “Ter” furnish the other parts; and after such a line is arranged, the right sequence of the name is clear.

Like Merrill’s “look closely,” Gower’s “*ecce loquela*” gestures at readers to investigate what is within the words he presents. The puzzle lacks the satiric undertones of Geoffrey’s and Alan’s wordplay and instead celebrates its subject (i.e., Gower) by drawing together pieces of different words into one name and identity. Though pretending to hide his name, Gower wants to be known, inviting the reader to engage in syllabic play and rebuild what the poet has cut apart and spread within the lines. As in the Oxford riddle tradition and Isidore of Seville, who states that a syllable is called *semipes* because a syllable is half a metric foot, heads and feet signify syllables and sometimes even letters of syllables.¹²⁴ The plural usage, *primos pedes*, a metonymy for “head,” underscores Book 1’s theme of inversion by swapping heads for feet, indicates that the first two letters of “Godfridi” are required. A reader can remove the “caput” from one syllable, such as the *T* from “Ter,” to reveal the “membra” of another word, the *er* serving as the “feet” in “Gower.” Fragments make sense through play, by unscrambling their parts. (Lest we have trouble, though, the gloss in the margin openly declares, “Nota de nomine Iohannis Gower.”) Scholars have puzzled about who Godfried and Wales are or what “Ter” can also mean, but the point is the riddle itself, the seeming chaos and the wordplay that solves it. By making his readers aware of a word’s body—its *pedes*, *caput*, *membra*—Gower prepares us for the heads and feet of the rebels in the ensuing chapters. For him, syllabic play

¹²⁴ For *semipes*, see Isidore, *Etymologies*, trans. Stephen A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 1.xvi.2. Interestingly, Isidore also states that a single vowel is not a syllable, because a true syllable is a gathering of letters. This conceptualization of the syllable accords with Gower’s perception of meanings within parts and play with parts within parts.

provides more than a poetic opening; it offers a way of seeing social inversion through a linguistic metaphor, in which the peasants, and not the poet, do the cropping and adding of heads to empower their own *membra*.

The prominence of Gower's syllabic play can be best seen when contrasted to Machaut's name game at the end of his *Le Remede de Fortune*, in which the poet similarly draws attention to his playful concealment of his name, though the mode of concealment differs:

Mais en la fin de ce traité
Que j'ay compilé et traité
Veul mon non et mon seurnon mettre,
Sans sillabe oublier ne letter;
Et cilz qui savoir le vourra
De legier savoir le porra;
Car le quart ver, si com je fin,
Commencement, moyen, et fin
Est de mon nom, qui tous entiers
Y est, sans faillir quart ne tiers. (4259-68)¹²⁵

At the end of the treatise that I've compiled and composed, I want to place my first and last names, without omitting a syllable or letter; and he who wishes to know them can easily discover them; for the fourth line from the end is the beginning, middle, and end of my name, which is there in its entirety, not lacking a quarter or a third.

There is a seemingly scientific precision in this prelude to the puzzle: the name game is located not immediately following but precisely on the fourth line from the end ("le quart ver, si com je fin"), and the name itself lacks not a quarter ("sans faillir quart ne tiers"). Machaut further draws attention to the complete representation of his name in letters and syllables ("Sans sillabe oublier"), the terminology of syllabic play.

However, syllables are not the building blocks by which we reconstruct his name in this fourth to last line:

¹²⁵ Guillaume de Machaut, *Le Jugement du Roy de Behaigne and Le Remede de Fortune*, edited by James I. Wimsatt and William W. Kibler (Athens: University of Georgia Press: 1988). Translation by Wimsatt and Kibler.

Li change mal, u tu me dis (4297)

Enjambment before and after link this fragment to the rest of the sentence, focused on his lady's love and his hopeful change in fortune: "And this Hope is within me, that my dear lady loves me, so sweetly cheers my heart that its sorrow is changed to great joy and comfort, when you tell me that my dit will be welcomed by her." The puzzle's position in the narrative frame links the change of heart with the change of the line into Machaut's name. The line is an anagram; unscrambled, it reads, "Guillemin de Machaut," Guillemin being a variation of Guillaume. Concealing his name only to reveal it brilliantly through wordplay, Machaut seamlessly grafts his anagram into verse, a feat he performs more than once.¹²⁶ However much the name game conveys sparkling virtuosity and arbitrary elegance, it is not syllabic play. It lacks the Latin tradition's insistence on syllabic structure, in which words are divided in orderly parts that retain coherence as parts. Anagrams can be reassembled any which-way; it does not matter, for example, which "a" in the line is used for the two *a*'s in "Machaut." With syllabic play, by contrast, parts of words are rearranged into new words in specified locations, at the head and feet of words. Syllables allow for fewer ways of scrambling words, but semantic layers proliferate, especially when the pieces themselves pun with answers. Separating "cor" from "cornix"; "In" from "Innocent"; and "re" from "regula" are not a mere scramble but a mode of making meaning by cutting words into pieces.

That such riddles find themselves applied to political contexts is hardly surprising. They are an effective mode of erudite satire, political prophesy, and social commentary. John Ergome, for one, owned a copy of the *Secretum*, which guided his

¹²⁶ See the conclusion to *Le Jugement du Roy de Behaigne*. For the anagram's solution, see Ernest Hoepffner, "Anagramme und Rätselgedichte bei Guillaume de Machaut," *Zeitschrift für romanische Philologie* 30 (1906): 405. For a translation of Hoepffner's explanation and discussion, see Wimsatt and Kibler, 490 and 513.

reading of John of Bridlington's political prophesies.¹²⁷ Moreover, in his chronicle on the 1381 Rebellion, Thomas Walsingham attributes enigmas to the rebels—he deemed their propaganda full of them (“aenigmatibus plenam”)—hinting at the rebels' debt to the riddle tradition (Galloway, 85). Gower not only makes this connection but links his own writing to the same literary inheritance. In a tour de force that both empowers the peasants and his own craft as the author of the *Vox*, he dramatizes the trope of enigma in the rebels' metamorphoses. To be sure, the first book of the *Vox*, like the *Secretum*, abounds with literal knife tricks, but attention must be placed on the literary nature of the *Vox*'s tricks as syllabic play.

Knife Tricks

Scholars have criticized Gower's less-than-literary account of the 1381 Rebellion, with its excessive repetition and lachrymose descriptions of mobs made monsters. Some readers would be more interested in the metamorphoses of asses, pigs, geese, and the like, if these beasts represented different historical social groups who participated in the rebellion. Such allegory hunting, however, is similar to an interpretative approach focusing on the meaning of Godfried, Wales, and *Ter* without appreciating the method by which these words are cut apart. The repeated metamorphoses of different animals reinforce Gower's link between the rebels' physical metamorphoses and the metamorphoses of words through syllabic play. As a kind of language puzzle, the metamorphoses show the peasants taking a more active role in developing powerful heads, feet, and bodies, which metaphorically make the peasants players with language, just like Gower.

¹²⁷ Galloway, “The Rhetoric of Riddling,” 78.

Attributing linguistic play to animals is not unique to Gower. In *De Planctu Naturae*, Nature's garment depicts a swan that "uite uaticinabatur apocopam" [prophesied the end of a life].¹²⁸ Jan Ziolkowski notes that the phrase plays upon the rhetorical term *apocopa*, the dropping of a syllable at the end of a word. Alan thus links the swan's visionary power and song to its role in grammatical and syllabic play. Another example from both bestiary literature and Alan is the beaver, which, because of its name (*castor*), was traditionally thought to castrate itself to save its life from hunters who sought to kill the animal for its medicinally valuable testicles.¹²⁹ Using similar wording as before, Alan writes that this animal "apocopabat" its sexual organs, snipping them off as if the beaver's body were a linguistic construct. Both animals' behavior is seen in grammatical terms that show their engagement with language and their own bodies. Gower's beasts are a perversion of this tendency in nature to live by a kind of grammatical law, and he further develops his characters to narrate how they have deviated from the natural order with grave consequences for society.

For one thing, though his characters undergo an initial, passive metamorphosis into beasts of burden, they do not allow themselves to be put into servitude. Their resistance is depicted in metaphoric terms that recall syllabic games, such as Geoffrey of Vinsauf's play on Innocent's innocence by taking off the Pope's "head" and Gower's addition of a head for an inclement Clement. In a sense, both Innocent and Clement undergo metamorphoses by having their heads modified. Gower's beasts, however, refuse such tampering. Gower's asses will not bear halters on their heads; the unyoked oxen, in turn, have free necks; the pigs have no rings in their noses or constraints on their necks; and the boar refuses a collar and uses its head to wound its

¹²⁸ Ziolkowski, *Alan of Lille's Grammar of Sex*, 18.

¹²⁹ See, for example, T. H. White, *A Book of Beasts* (New York: Dover, 1984), 28-29.

enemies (“ex capite fortissima” 1.331). When Circe’s forces join the mob, we are told that their *capita* flicker back and forth from men to beasts because of their lack of reason, but also perhaps because these *capita* shift at need to resist their former masters and better advance themselves (1.782). Gower describes how these beasts no longer do farm work, as in these lines on the pigs’ refusal to have their snouts domesticated:

Non erat in nares torques qui posset eorum
Ponere, quin faciunt fossa timenda nimis (1.315-6)

There was no one who could put rings in their noses so that the pigs would not dig the most fearful ditches.

At first it is not clear why the ditches are “timenda” or needing to be feared, but the word “fossa” has a more sinister meaning, as it does later in the Book, after the rebels have joined together under the leadership of Wat Tyler and John Balle. There we learn that “subito fossa dolore pauent” (1.811). These are no mere ditches, but graves that tremble at the mob’s threatening roar. Thus, the animals, unfettered by aristocratic and ecclesiastical control, have become dangerous diggers of graves (1.348).

Perhaps this danger is Gower’s main point, yet Gower’s fascination with this repeated image of animals resisting the yoke of authority also serves to show how his syllabic games have been rendered powerless against their own play. The lawless heads of the asses—heads without halters, “caput” without “capistrum” (“Perdidit . . . capitis sine lege capistrum” 1.187)—cannot be controlled by Gower as he controls Clement, the *gula*-monks, and even his own name. With bodies no longer constrained to serve former masters, the rebels gain new power in their hybrid nature, for the animals improve their own bodies by appropriating parts from others, as a sort of language puzzle in reverse, as if they were poets capable of editing their own names, bodies, and social identities.

Thus all these animals resist the control of their masters, and, by extension, the control of poets like Gower. Indeed, Gower condemns their behavior and phrases it in syllabic terms, but the difference is that, while his syllabic play unmasks Clement's covert monstrosity and evil games with other men's heads, Gower's beast peasants gain power through syllabic play and openly use physical and syllabic monstrosities to their advantage. Already monsters and violators of the social hierarchy, they cannot be unmasked or brought down by such satire. It is as though Gower might wish to treat them with the same dispatch as Clement, but the beast peasants have a physical and linguistic authority that renders Gower's satire powerless. As we see in their metamorphoses, the beast peasants enact their own name-games, creating new identities to empower themselves.

The first metamorphosis, that of the asses, is important because it shows Gower's shift in emotion from derisive humor to fear. Seeing an uncanny metamorphosis for the first time, immediately after the peasants are changed into beasts of burden, the narrator lingers longer over how the asses are and are not what they seem to be. Like the pigs and oxen, their heads (1.187) no longer bear the tools of the field, for they have changed into fierce animals, with the "viscera" of lions (1.185). With a new leonine wildness, they refuse to be controlled and are becoming threatening. However, they are still trapped in their original form. For Gower, their metamorphosis reveals the comically pathetic attempt to play with puzzles that backfire. Like their forefather Burnellus, the asses are not happy with their bodies:

Vt vetus ipse suam curtam Burnellus inepte
Caudam longari de nouitate cupit,
Sic isti miseri noua tergaque longa requirunt,
Vt leo de cauda sint et Asellus idem.
Pelle leonina tectum se pinxit Asellus,
Et sua transcendit gloria vana modum:
Cauda suo capiti quia se conferre nequibat,
Contra naturam sorte requirit opem.

Attempant igitur fatui, poterint vt aselli
Quod natura vetat amplificare sibi:
Quam sibi plantauit caudam qui contulit aures
Non curant, set eam vilius esse putant. (1.201-212)

Just as old Burnel foolishly wanted his short tail newly made long, in order that the ass and the lion might have the same kind of tail, so these wretched creatures wanted new, straight backs. The ass fashioned himself as covered with a lion's skin, and his vainglory overstepped its bounds. By chance he sought an aid contrary to nature, since he could not attach a tail to his head. Thus did the foolish asses try as they might to aggrandize themselves with what nature denied them. They did not care for the tail which He who gave them their ears implanted in them, but thought it too vile a thing.

The asses' attempt to "conferre" their tails to their heads is a crux: how can such a connection be natural? As we will see in more detail in Chapter Five, this connection is entirely natural in the zodiac, in which one constellation's feet connects to the next one's head. Gower may have something similar in mind here, which shows the rebels seeking a type of order of their own making. The narrator mocks their attempt. The asses, though powerful in their revolt, are unable to get rid of their short tails, long ears, and bent backs. At first, their efforts to improve their bodies seem wishful thinking without hope. The asses want long, lion-like tails to lash themselves into a frenzy, but because their tails are short, their tail-lashing is woefully inadequate. *Cauda* is not a syllabic term in Gower's puzzle in the Prologue, but it works the same way as *pedes* and serves as a synonym for the endings of words. Thus, this moment shows the animals' first attempt at syllabic play, but their initial efforts seem flawed. The ass, like Geoffrey's Innocent or Gower's Clement, is at odds with itself, with a head and feet (or tail) that do not properly match. Gower's scorn for these animals is reminiscent of the poetics mocked by Horace in the opening lines of his *Ars Poetica*, in which he hypothesizes that poets who create hybrid bodies in their literature, like mermaids or a man-headed horse, would only make their readers laugh. Gower relishes how the asses will never be gentlemanly or lordly creatures by nature, but this

smug superiority does not last for long. For the asses *do* manage to take on more menacing bodies, ones the citizens of London will not find a laughing matter. By the end of the second chapter, the asses run faster than leopards, arm themselves with gore-stained horns, and bear tails *longer* than a lion's.

His description of the asses and then other animals as manipulators of parts reveals an idiosyncratic, personal way of looking at the Rebellion, for Gower portrays the rebels as men who manipulate the body politic much as he does: through wordplay, through changing around syllables until new meanings emerge, until the beast peasants reverse the hierarchical roles of master and servant, man and beast. Indeed, the description of the asses ends by saying they had the "vires" of law (1.235), meaning they had strength over law, but the word *vires* comes from *vir*, or "man." Just as Gower's syllabic play creates ambiguity between the name and the owner's true nature, the metaphors of the rebels' bodies have pointed out social instability: Who then are the beasts and who are the men, if the beasts have the power (and the manhood) of law? Writing in these terms, Gower casts the Rebellion with a poetic eye and metaphorically casts the peasants as destructive manipulators of language.

The asses' new horns and other parts seem to appear out of thin air, but some animals become hybrids by body-snatching parts from other animals, as in the rooster's metamorphosis:

Falconis rostrum rapuit sibi gallus et vngues (1.521)
The cock seized the falcon's beak and talons for itself

Though it befits a *raptor* to *rapere*, the falcon's body becomes prey to a socially ambitious rooster, who appropriates the falcon's beak and talons. His companion in crime, the gander, also becomes a raptor. His ambition is even loftier: "ex alis sidera tacta cupit" (1.522).¹³⁰ He wants to touch the stars with his wings, a desire that goes

¹³⁰ Is this goose a would-be poet, who not only engages in syllabic play but also seeks poetic fame? Compare this line with the last two lines of Horace's Ode 1.1: "quodsi me lyricis vatibus inseres, /

against nature, for Brunetto Latini's *Tresor* specifically describes the gander as a low-flying bird and the antithesis of the high-flying eagle.¹³¹ Nevertheless, the gander's wish is granted when he becomes a kite or *miluus*, which is both a bird of prey and a constellation, described by Ovid in his *Fasti* 3.793-808. Ovid's kite was lifted to the stars as a reward for helping Jupiter crush a rebellion of the Titans, by delivering to Jupiter the entrails of a hybrid monster. Gower's kite, by contrast, *is* a hybrid monster, lifted to the stars by his own will to rebel.

Gower's horror seems most aroused by the animals' ability to tweak their bodies to make themselves powerful hybrids. The cows, for example, have traded in their hoofs for bear paws and wear dragonish tails as well: "Vrsinosque pedes caudas similesque draconum / Gestant" [They wore bear's feet and tails like those of dragons] (1.255-6). The language of feet and tails is reminiscent of Alan's horror at the destroyed male dactylic foot in society, causing chaos in linguistic and sexual mores. Gower's *pedes* are not sexual here, but the feeling of Alan's "Gramatice leges" being disastrously broken is just as strong. These hybrids are grotesque limb-swappers. They relinquish their arms ("Arma . . . linquant") in both senses of the word: they put away their farm tools, but they also swap ursine limbs for their old "arma" (1.277).

Nothing is sacred to these beasts. The feast of Corpus Christi is a day of games of inversion, but these hybrid beasts profane Christ with their games with the *corpus*. The pigs, for example, are bristling and full of a demonic spirit: "Cristatos . . . demone plenos" (1.301). Gower connects these pigs with the Biblical story of the demon-possessed swine in Mark 5, but he also takes advantage of the sound-play

sublimi feriam sidera vertice." If Horace were placed among lyric poets, his head would bump against the stars. The gander-kite's syllabic metamorphosis echoes that poetic ambition of heavenward ascent.¹³¹ Brunetto Latini, *Li Livres dou Tresor*, ed. Spurgeon Baldwin and Paul Barrette (Tempe, AZ: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2003). Of all birds, the goose and gander are "plus grief & plus pesans" (64). Barrette and Baldwin translate this as "slower and heavier" in Brunetto Latini, *The Book of the Treasure (Li Livres dou Tresor)*, trans. Barrette and Baldwin (New York: Garland, 1993), 62.

between Christ and *cristatus*. Instead of a Christly image, we encounter a boar's demon-possessed, plume-like bristles. When Gower refers to the rebels as the "demon meridianus," or the mid-day demon, he is referring to their hybrid nature's profane quality (1.737). Words that describe these rebels take on a hybrid quality, too, for the boar not only "minatur" (1.343) or menaces; he could even be said to *Minotaur*, using his hybrid body to destroy and dominate.

In many of his lines Gower laments the rebels' ability to mix their features and create such monstrous bodies: "Mixtaque sic pariter sunt metuenda magis" [And mixed this way they were the more to be feared] (1.510), and "sint mala mixta malis" [They mingled mischief with mischief] (1.600). This type of "mixing" also has a political, as well as a grammatical and physical force, for these are scenes in which animals congregate and form unnatural alliances. Mutual treaties of peace ("Mutua concordēs federa pacis habent") spring up between foxes and dogs; formerly natural enemies now are "concordēs" (1.490). The cats "sociantur" or ally themselves with the foxes and dogs, and even the frogs and flies form an alliance ("sociata"). The animals not only improve their bodies by mixing parts of their bodies with those of other animals, but they also mix with the larger social body to unite themselves and destroy the preexisting social order.

But these bonds of peace are adulterous and evil; indeed, *foedus* (the singular of *foedera* from 1.490) is a noun meaning a compact or covenant, but it is also an adjective meaning foul or filthy. Much as Alan of Lille laments the perversion of grammatical ties in human love, Gower laments the affairs between beasts. When *amor* grows where there should not be any, the gander is no longer with his goose and takes a chicken as his lover: "Ancer et ipse suam, cum qua se miscuit, aucam / Linquit, et in predam spirat vbique nouam" [And when the gander coupled with her [the hen], he deserted his own goose and aspired to new game everywhere.] (1.549-50). The

verb “miscuit” takes on not just a syllabic but a sexual meaning, and the love affair between the gander and Coppa the hen not only betrays the goose but Coppa’s cuckolded cock. Sexuality and Coppa’s copulative nature, though, are not what principally bother the narrator. Coppa incites the rooster and gander to violence, which is Gower’s real cause of concern. These strange bonds of love soon include the owls, and the “amor inter eos” or love between them causes new acts of violence against men (1.556).

The rebels thus engage in many games of social and linguistic mixing, and with syllabic play they make hybrids out of words and bodies. As if syllabic play makes them more attuned to linguistic games, they sometimes show themselves to be aptly named in perverse ways. For example, the linguistic connection between *canis* and *cano* made Latin writers associate the dog with song, but dogs no longer sing their traditional *cantus*.¹³² Instead, sounds of fury replace the bay of hunting hounds. Their English names suit the dogs better: “Cutte que Curre simul rapidi per deuia currunt” [Cut and Cur ran swiftly together through the alleys] (1.395). The soundplay in “Curre” and “currunt” link the dogs’ new urge to tear across the countryside, where they will presumably “Cutte” down anything they find. Even house cats distort their names. Gower could have used the word *cattus* for cat, but instead he chooses the word *murilegos* (literally, “mouse catchers”). The choice is significant, for these mouse catchers no longer catch *mures* or mice and instead attack the *muri*, or the city walls. Thus the dogs singing destruction and cats attacking cities stay true to their names, but they do so only in a twisted, punning fashion.

¹³² *Canis* is “named from the melody (*canor*) of its barking, since it howls deeply and is said to sing (*canere*).” A dog’s sounds, unlike a wolf’s howl, are also melodious perhaps because dogs are known for their loyalty to men, and their sounds would be made in service to their masters. See White, *Book of Beasts*, 61.

Gower tries to assert his own control by playing name-games. For example, early in Chapter 11 he mocks the rebels by casting their English names in his Latin poem, listing Wat, Tom, Sim, Will, Hogg, Ball, and so forth, to show how incongruous and gauche such names are in a Latin context. In other places he encodes Jack Straw's and Wat Tyler's names into the poem by calling them animal names or letting the Latin words represent them—"stramine" or straw (I.652) and "tegula" or tile (I.653). In case we might miss the Latin-English significance to the word, "graculus" or jackdaw, in the Latin header to Chapter 9 Gower writes of the "Graculus auis, anglice Gay, qui vulgariter vocatur Watte" [a certain Jackdaw (In English a Jay, which is commonly called Wat)]. The name games are reminiscent of riddles that operate on bilingual play, as the aforementioned "diviti duro" for "Richard."¹³³ These quips and games, however, are weak protests against a powerful rebel force, all the more frightening for what Steven Justice calls its "insurgent literacy," for these same presumably illiterate rebels are authors of letters that call for the fall of the state.¹³⁴ Justice notes that these epistolary authors cobble together catch-phrases and jingles that rhyme (e.g., "Johan þe mullere hæþ ygrounde smal smal smal þe kynges sone of heuene schal paye for al").¹³⁵ Gower's rebels, in contrast, manipulate syllables and are a more literary class of writers who work with the best techniques available (i.e., the Latin tradition Gower himself employs). In the face of such "assertive literacy," if I may again borrow from Justice, Gower admits that the state is overturned and phrases its overthrow in terms of syllabic play: piety is lost to impiety (1.1230); the tail weighs upon the head (1.1250); the foot is on the head (1.1760); the tile is on the crown (1.1759).¹³⁶ This last example describes an obviously mismatched hierarchy,

¹³³ Galloway, "Rhetoric of Riddling," 75.

¹³⁴ Steven Justice, *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 13.

¹³⁵ Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, 15.

¹³⁶ Justice, *Writing and Rebellion*, 24.

since a tile is a humbler object than a crown, but Gower's lament also hints at mob violence and the advancement of Wat Tyler. As Galloway points out, tiles literally covered crowns, for during the Revolt, the rebels threw tiles onto the heads of fleeing victims.¹³⁷ The topsy-turvy Latin-English wordplay (*tegula* / Tyler), actually depicts murder.

Gower's games ring hollow next to the rebels' play with syllables and metamorphoses, which weaken Gower's voice. The last line of the second chapter indicates his fright: "Nec dabat vltorius pes michi fidus iter" [and my trusty foot took me no farther] (1.240). Frozen physically and metrically, with a heavy caesura before *pes* and an unnaturally heavy stress on the last syllable of the word *vltorius* that creates an awkward rhythm to the line, his metrical "foot" staggers. He later makes the same claim about his faltering feet while the feet of the rebels rush around to trample the upper classes: "Vix potui tremulos ammodo ferre pedes" [I now could scarcely lift my trembling feet] (1.724). Here again the elegiac meter clashes awkwardly with how the words would normally be pronounced, causing undue stress on the last syllable of "tremulos," the first syllable of "ammodo," and the final syllable of "pedes." Examples of this mismatch between the metrical rhythm of a line and its natural pronunciation are not uncommon, but Gower's emphasis on his feet makes the faltering feet in these lines more noticeable. Like the falcon and other victims whose parts are snatched away from them, Gower comes undone in this language of syllabic play enacted upon him. His fear and horror at the metamorphosed peasants coincide with the play on the word *pes*. The peasants not only swap their *pedes* for better ones; they cause the narrator's feet, metrical and physical, to stumble. Perhaps they could even be said to disturb the *pes*, toying with the English meaning, *peace*.

¹³⁷ For a discussion of the *Anonimale Chronicle* and the tile throwing, see Andrew Galloway, "Gower in His Most Learned Role and the Peasants' Revolt of 1381," *Mediaevalia* 16, (1993 [for 1990]), 329-47.

This *caput-pedes* theme, found early in the *Vox I*, has its climax later in the book when the mob kills many victims, including Simon Sudbury, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Once congregated in their new bodies with new alliances, the peasants strike back at their betters in the same way they upgraded their bodies: swapping parts. The new policy is to have many a nobleman “decapitatus” (1.836), and by removing the head in grisly syllabic play, they gain control of the city. The “membra” no longer respect the “caput” set above them by divine and natural law (1.1054). The effect underscores how the *caput* is helpless to the lower members that cut and rearrange the body politic. In this bottoms-up political change, Gower uses language from his original name-game as the rebels carry the Archbishop’s head: “O maledicta manus caput abscisum ferientis!” [O cursed hand carrying the severed head!] (1.1129). Ironically, God’s curse has enabled the peasants to become a curse to the political order, their lowly hand decapitating a powerful head of state. This flipped hierarchy of the peasants and Archbishop parodies Gower’s name-game, ripping words apart but this time yielding chaos instead of meaning. Gower curses the rebels for their immorality but phrases his scorn in syllabic terms. He laments the hand over the head; the tail over the head: “Deprimit immo suum cauda maligna caput” [(an evil) tail weighed heavily upon the head] (1.1250); and the foot over the head, as in this description of the Tower: “cecidit fragili sub pede forte caput” [by chance the top fell under a weak foot] (1.1760).

Yet Gower’s condemnation of the foot’s power over the head is perhaps problematic. For one thing, Geoffrey’s name-game lops off the head because it does not suit the feet (or meter). In poetry, feet have a higher status than the head. Gower, likewise, affirms this privilege of the feet in his own name-game when he refers to the first letters of his last name (the “head” of that word) as the “*primos pedes*,” the first feet. Gower’s outrage at a flipped hierarchy reveals confusion over that hierarchy, for

if the peasants are the lowly *pedes*, as these lines suggest, *they* are the force that sets the metric scheme forward. The evil deeds conducted by the head, which Gower deals with in the remaining Books of the *Vox*, have led to this sudden and brutal insistence on those social metrics.

Immediately after Gower curses the mob's violence, he purposely describes the Archbishop's murder with this language of *caput* and *pedes* at odds:

Vtque salire solet mutulati cauda colubri,
Palpitat et moritur qui solet esse caput. (1.1141-2)

As the tail of a wounded snake is wont to writhe, he who used to be our leader trembled and died.

Reduced in death into an ailing snake, the man who should have been the *caput* is now the *cauda*, just as Gower's fright reduced him to frozen *pedes* earlier in the Book; both men change as dramatically as Alan's active verbs that now are passive. The striking metaphor of the snake's tail, from the *Metamorphoses* 6.559, points to Gower's interest in metamorphoses, which affect all social classes in a freakish reversal, except that there is no real head of state anymore. The head has become the tail, and in Ovid's poem, this snake metaphor was used to describe Philomela's tongue as it quivered on the ground. The Archbishop suffers the same feminine, passive helplessness to stop the violence, gore, and horror enacted upon his body, nor can the Archbishop or Philomela prevent a higher member of the body (a head or a tongue) from changing into something grotesque and worthless like a serpent's tail. The beheaded Archbishop has been robbed of his dignity and voice, but unlike Philomela, who avenges her rape and torment and ultimately sings a nightingale's song, as she does in the opening of the *Vox* (1.99), Simon Sudbury will have no such resurrection.¹³⁸ The Archbishop's tongue, like Gower's feet, is stopped short, and the

¹³⁸ Moreover, Gower does not use this snake metaphor when he retells Philomela's tale in Book 5 of the *Confessio Amantis*. The focus lies not on the severed tongue but on the remaining piece of tongue in

peasants are shown as aggressors against language, destroyers of heads of state and the old hierarchy's *vox*.

I hope to have shown that the way the beast peasants manipulate bodies shares a striking similarity with what Gower does with syllables. Language and the body are malleable for anyone who knows how to control them with a type of syllabic play—taking off and attaching certain parts. Though there are a number of small-scale syllabic games in the *Vox* (e.g., *regula / gula*), the early chapters on metamorphosis show Gower's most ambitious experiment with syllabic play, describing how the body, metaphorically linked to the word, is manipulated to control the social hierarchy. In these opening chapters, Gower emphasizes linguistic play in the peasants' metamorphoses—their hands, feet, and other members of the body—as a process that resembles his own poetic play. The series of different animals gives Gower a lot of heads and feet and *membra* with which to underscore this syllabic game.

By depicting the peasants as beasts that construct their own bodies, and do so with the language of syllabic play, Gower writes his own technique into the rebellion, which shows his fascination and fear of what language gone wrong can do. Elsewhere in the *Vox*, he picks apart words to satirize groups of people, but here he seems to let the game with words run out of control. After these chapters on freakish metamorphoses, he pants a forty-line speech heavy with anaphora. The repetition indicates his difficulty moving his “tremulos pedes,” as he calls them later in the Book (1.724), and the section formally divides his chapters on the unnamed beasts with the “real” start of events in Chapter 9, beginning with Wat Tyler and swiftly moving to

her mouth that allows her only to “chitre and as a brid jargoune” and foreshadows her metamorphosis into a nightingale (5.5700).

the storming of the Tower. The anaphora shows immense exhaustion, which he and the entire realm feel at these plague-like metamorphoses. By the times the jay attacks, the realm is weakened into submission. Moreover, the anaphora signals his helplessness at this poetic puzzle that seems to have no meaning behind it—it is wordplay that scrambles around and destroys, created by anti-poets whose “pedes” are described at one point as drunk and unguided (1.952). Even though such rebels invert order and conquer their betters, their *arma* are crude and backwards, as shown in the “eusersam pharetram”, the quiver turned back upon itself, aimed in ignorance (1.849). These accusations show Gower’s bitter sense of class distinctions—not to mention his suggestive mockery of their clumsiness with a quiver in contrast to his own elegant image as an archer, illustrated in the *Vox* manuscript, British Library MS Cotton Tiberius A. iv. Fol. 8v. However, they also smart from his sense of poetics and the knowledge he too has turned his quiver upon himself, since two can play at his game with language.

Gower’s willingness to divide the voices of his poem between the poet’s persona and the rebels is the norm for his mode of composition. Just as peasants take control of syllables in the *Vox* and compete with Gower’s voice, so in the *Confessio* he will experiment with this mode of division and champion the causes of peasants and women, whose words are more eloquent and honest than kings. Meanwhile, Genius, ostensibly the poem’s singular voice of authority, fluctuates in his allegiances to Venus, God, and Amans, which explains the inadequacy of many of his moralizations on the tales. The magic of the *Confessio*, though, is this multiple voicing, the fact that Genius and Amans are not easily defined and at times do not even seem to know themselves what to think. The *Confessio*’s central uncertainty, and opportunity for other voices, owes a debt to Gower’s experimentation with metamorphosis and play in the *Vox Clamantis*. In terms of its attention to language, detail, and competing voices,

the *Vox* is the first of many experiments and the seedbed for Gower's future poetry. If the *Vox* has traditionally been read as a poem of blacks and whites, peasants versus aristocrats, the way Gower wrote of this divide tells a different story, not flipping that hierarchy, but yoking the two camps lexically. The technique bespeaks Gower's poetic impulse to see through metaphors of language, and the humanitarian impulse of the alchemist to unite what is divided.

Chapter Three

Golden Measure: Arion and Alchemy in Chaucer and Gower

There's more than one way to be right
About the opposite of *white*,
And those who merely answer *black*
Are very, very single-track.

They make me want to scream, "I beg
Your pardon, but within an egg
(A fact known to the simplest folk)
The opposite of white is *yolk!*"

—Richard Wilbur, from *Opposites*¹³⁹

Chaucer and Gower's writings on alchemy have historically been polarized by critics. Chaucer's *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* is "artistic," while Gower's is considered encyclopedic.¹⁴⁰ Other authors have puzzled over the connection between alchemy and language as analogous, slippery arts. Gower's text has received minimal attention from such scholars, but his concern for language is equally as present, though he subtly focuses on a different aspect of language, the Latin tradition and the failure of translation. In this chapter, I wish to bring out these overlooked elements in Gower's text, and to position alchemy as a scientific pursuit not unlike Gower's call for a bard in the tradition of Arion. Both arts require a meticulous attention to "measure," which in music is the power to harness sound and motion. Alchemy's *measure* rests on a similar process of diverse elements united, a process dependent upon the sound and motion of translation. Chaucer's cynicism toward alchemy makes his treatment of language complex, yet the converse is true in Gower, in that his admiration for alchemy and belief in its original efficacy make his statement on Latin translation problematic, for Latin failed to follow the lead of more ancient authorities.

¹³⁹ Wilbur, *Collected Poems*, 491.

¹⁴⁰ Stanton J. Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 44. I am indebted to Jonathan Juifs' unpublished graduate seminar essay, "Two Sides to Every Coin," for noting Linden's observation and making many others.

Arion and the Measure of Music

The Arion episode not only offers a social vision but a idyllic revision of human history, past, present, and future. The passage opens not with a declaration of what will happen, but what might happen, beginning with the tellingly tentative conjunction, “Bot.” This “But” sets the Arion passage in opposition, or as an alternative, to the apocalyptic tale from the Book of Daniel that precedes it. The dream of Nebuchadnezzar and the description of (and smashing of) the Statue of Precious Metals is given more space in the text and more authority in its prominence here and in Gower’s Latin colophon at the end of the *Confessio*. Nebuchadnezzar’s stark vision presents human history as a degenerative process doomed to failure, a vision of history in which human endeavors increasingly are debased, and God’s intervention is to bring human history to a close. “Bot.” And yet. The lexical and topical shift indicates Gower’s resistance to use God’s smashing stone as the tombstone of human history, and the Arion episode proposes redemption without destruction.

The shift to this evocative vision of Arion coaxing human hearts to fill with peace is an uplifting epilogue to the grim image of God smashing the statue with apocalyptic finality. The epilogue does not supplant Daniel but it takes that vision of the future and weaves beauty and redemption into its message. In fact, its taking up and remaking the previous themes demonstrates counterpoint, a musical concept that gained increasing prominence in music after the 12th century, when polyphonic music offered new possibilities in incorporating different harmonies into one piece of music. By asking readers to hold both Daniel and Arion simultaneously, Gower also asks readers to marvel at the effects of Arion’s counterpoint on all who listen:

Bot wolde God that now were on
 An other such as Arion,
 Which hadde an harpe of such temprure,
 And therto of so good mesure
 He song, that he the bestes wilde
 Made of his note tame and milde,
 The hinde in pes with the leoun,
 The wolf in pes with the moltoun,
 The hare in pees stod with the hound;
 And every man upon this ground
 Which Arion that time herde,
 Als wel the lord as the schepherde,
 He broghte hem alle in good acord;
 So that the comun with the lord,
 And lord with the comun also,
 He sette in love bothe tuo (Prol. 1053-68)

Anaphora (“The hinde...The wolf...The hare”) is Gower’s way of focusing attention on the list of beasts and social estates. His emphasis is on Arion’s audience, diverse yet harmonious. This is of a piece with medieval musical theory, in which counterpoint brings together diverse elements harmoniously. Harmonia herself, the daughter of Venus and Mars, is born of contraries. Gower does not refer to this myth, but he lexically explores the theme of counterpoint by concatenating his list not only with anaphora but with the interlocking placement of his classes of animals and people in an AB-BA-AB pattern. Anaphora provides a template, “The *hinde* in pes with the *leoun*,” setting up a relationship between prey and predator, yet the subsequent line, structured with anaphora like an echo, reverses the prey-predator relationship, “The wolf in pes with the moltoun,” and again reverses the roles to the original prey-predator relationship, “The hare in pees stod with the hound.” What Gower is doing here is not simply anaphora but an effort into interweave conflicting elements (predators and prey), and using meaningful repetition to yoke them. The device is not unlike *rime riche* in which couplets are yoked by shared rhyme words, or like the zodiac of Book 7 in which animals are yoked by shared stars. The sharing of anaphora comes with the twist in flip-flopping the categories of beasts from prey to predator.

Writing this way fashions a lexical and social zodiac, yoking together traditional enemies in a stasis of peace. Like music, rhetoric possesses the power to make reversals in the social realm, as well as make a suggestive social commentary on man's role as predator and prey. In the portrait of the classes of humanity, the anaphora is weakened, but the predator-prey pattern remains implied and gathers all classes into this zodiacal body. The line "The hare in pees stod with the hound," makes the reader expect to see the hound's predatory partner (Is it a bear? Leopard? Fox?), and the predator is gradually divulged in the next two lines that transition from beasts to men to reveal that "man" is the predator, specifically the "lord" at odds with shepherds and commoners. The shepherd, of course, points to the pastoral setting Arion provides, indicating Gower's sympathy for the lower class estate. Thus, even as Gower invokes "every man" as those in need of Arion's curative power, he implies that the lord is the predator, his people the prey. Grouping lions, wolves, hounds, and lords as predators, and hinds, sheep, rabbits, commoners, and shepherds as prey, Gower uses animals to speak about humanity. Nevertheless, the image is less about social estates satire, and more about counterpoint, bring all these conflicting elements together in symphony, in one social body.

Gower, then, is writing social commentary, but his primary purpose is to portray social unity achieved through the technical precision of the musical arts. Gower lauds Arion's "mesure," because for him, musical charm (as well as verbal and astronomical charm) lies within the technical accomplishment of ordered placement. Arion's "mesure" points to a science of music, which was part of the quadrivium and closely linked to the hard sciences. As James Dean wrote in a chapter of his *World Grown Old* that links *mesure* with the body and ultimately Nebuchadnezzar's Statue of Precious Metals, "This 'mesure' partakes of the divine arithmetic by means of which God first created the world. According to Solomon, God has disposed (or

ordained) ‘alle thingis in mesure, and in noumbre, and in weiȝte’ (Wisd. Of Sol. 11.21).”¹⁴¹ *Measure* is humanity’s access to divine, creative power. *Measure* is literally restorative; Langland’s Holy Church declares that “measure is medicine,” linking *measure* not to arithmetic but to the science of medicine, itself a discipline connected to that of arithmetic and astronomy, since man’s body is reflected in the cosmos and vice versa (B.1.35).¹⁴² A musical principle, measurement brings together sound and motion through time.¹⁴³ With measurement as the marriage of sound and motion, music is an ideal tool with which to repair the flawed motion of the contemporary world, turning the tide from hate to peace and healing the ailing social body. As Gower concludes his discussion of music and ends the Prologue, he invokes the curative power of ordered sound on the present-day world:

And if ther were such on now,
 Which cowthe harpe as he tho dede,
 He myhte availe in many a stede
 To make pes wher now is hate;
 For whan men thenken to debate,
 I not what other thing is good.
 Bot wher that wisdom waxeth wod,
 And reson torneth into rage,
 So that mesure upon outrage
 Hath set his world, it is to drede;
 For that bringth in the comun drede,
 Which stant at every mannes Dore.
 Bot whan the scharpnesse of the spore
 The horse side smit to sore,
 It grieveth ofte. And now nomore,
 As for to speke of this matiere,
 Which non bot only God may stiere. (Prol. 1072-88)

¹⁴¹ James Dean, *The World Grown Old in Later Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1997), 263.

¹⁴² Louise M. Bishop, *Words, Stones, and Herbs: The Healing Word in Early Modern England* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 3.

¹⁴³ See the discussion of Augustine’s *On Music*, in Herbert M. Schueller, *The Idea of Music: An Introduction to Musical Aesthetics in Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1988), 241-3.

The series of oxymora, beginning with wisdom and waxing into insanity, recall similar constructions in Gower's *Vox Clamantis*; here, Gower underscores that modern times operate on flawed foundations, and mismanaged music portrays a wrongheaded social vision and order gone wrong. The waxing of wisdom brings not amplification of its goodness but rather its antithesis, madness; reason and rage are similarly linked in alliteration and a process of metamorphic unbecoming, a generation of opposites. *Mesure* is being used here to signify temperance and moderation paradoxically turned into excess. In the context of Gower's search for a modern Arion, *mesure* underscores the connection between the science of art and social practice. The dual meanings of *mesure* and its opposite underscore that music, *mesure*, is a thing of power that can "set" the world according to its pattern (if excess can be called a pattern); like the *Vox*'s rebel-poets, these makers of excess have power to fashion the world after themselves. The danger of Gower's universe is how slippery the demarcations are between these conflicting forms of *mesure* and of good and evil that permeate all boundaries. In the sequences above illustrating the fall of wisdom, reason, and measure, a series of weakening verbs illustrate social decay: wisdom waxes amiss (active verb), reason is turned into rage (passive voice), and finally, a verb is not even required to convert *mesure* to its opposite—its prepositional modifier is all that is required for *mesure* to signify its opposite and unsettle the world. In these lines of lexical erosion, the *rime riche* on *drede* caps the discussion. After all these freakish metamorphoses, the repetition in rhyme reveals the dead-end to which the world has come; the metamorphoses are the cryptic "that" of line 1082 which transforms one last time from an abstract threat into a personified one standing at the door.

Gower describes a topsy-turvy world in which words and things change before our eyes; *mesure* burgeons into its opposite, excess, becoming exactly what it is not. If *mesure* "Hath set this world," all would be well, and indeed some lines before Arion

is said to “sette in love” the social orders with his music (1081, 1068). However, that word “set” is belied by the ephemeral setting of order, in which *measure* devolves into mayhem. In Gower’s depiction of current day *measure* setting the world in its own order, the prepositional phrase “upon outrage” fosters the opposite of a loving world (1080). *Oultrage* primarily signifies the opposite of measure—excess, licentiousness, and indulgence—yet the “rage” in “outrage” is pronounced in rhyme and casts a more violent tone to the excess in discussion (and violence and crime are outrage’s secondary meanings according to the MED). This violence is given specificity in the beating of a horse by its rider who smites the horse’s sides with spurs. The example inverts the peace among natural enemies among animals (such as the hind and the lion) and among men (the “comun with the lord”) made by Arion’s music (1066). Using the metaphor of a horse and rider and following the abused animal’s perspective underscores Gower’s social critique of an oppressive upper class. He condemns the beastly behavior—the smiting—from those who should lead society with responsibility and love. *Measure* is not just an aesthetic value—not just mood music—but a social blueprint for bringing the ruling class in line, and Gower’s own *measure* falters at this moment when he laments “It grieveth ofte. And now nomore” (1086). The caesura and then abrupt transition, with a refusal to speak more on this fraught topic, indicate Gower’s ambivalence over how much Arion can actually help. Gower hands over this “matiere” to God alone and makes an important shift in metaphor from social *measure* to steering the ship of state (1087). He makes a similar move in Book 1 of the *Vox Clamantis* as a way of ending the beast metaphors and turning to divine intervention, a connection between the *Vox* and the Prologue which suggests a similar desperation on Gower’s part to find resolution for social disorder, changing tack when one metaphor proves endlessly complicated. Steering his way to the end of the Prologue, Gower seems burdened with England’s social disorder, the predicament in

which the oppressors—the ones who lead society in “measure upon outrage”—are hardly inclined to stop beating the horse under them. This abrupt shift may be a cynical sign that Arion and music do not measure up to social discord, but I will explore the possibility that the theme of restorative harmony is still at work, allowing Arion and God complimentary roles.

Gower seems to step away from the power of music at this late point in the Prologue, yet music has triumphed over evil forces before—Orpheus’ failure to bring back Eurydice was not a flaw of his music but his will; commentaries theorized his backward glance as Reason succumbing to the desire for *temporalia*.¹⁴⁴ Yeager and others have wondered why, in writing of an idealized artist, Gower chooses Arion over Orpheus, the era’s most famous bard.¹⁴⁵ An enlightened figure from the pagan past, Orpheus was Christianized as a monotheistic pupil of Moses and depicted as a Christ figure or as David, and the pastoral setting in which David and Orpheus often depicted is much like the pastoral setting of Gower’s Arion, in which beasts gather around the bard.¹⁴⁶ Gower also invests Arion with Messianic authority in the passage’s replay of Isaiah 11:6, “The wolf shall dwell with the lamb.”¹⁴⁷ Like Christ, Arion yokes in peace these same animals, “The wolf in pes with the moultoun,” while the hind, hare, and hound point to English hunting (1060). These beasts also figure in Ovid’s *Fasti* 2, which may explain Gower’s choice, but as a tamer and musician, Orpheus’ fame was

¹⁴⁴ For example, Pierre Bersuire writes, “But many are there who look backward through love of *temporalia* just as a dog returns to his vomit, and they love their wife too much, that is, the recovered soul, and so they favor their concupiscence and return the eyes of their mind to it and so they put her by and Hell receives her again. So says John 12:25, ‘He that loveth his life shall lose it.’” John Block Friedman, *Orpheus in the Middle Ages* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 128-9.

¹⁴⁵ Amphion, the next famous musician of legend after Orpheus, may be dismissed, for the foundational myth of Thebes of which Amphion plays a key role is irredeemably tainted when Theban soil is soaked with the blood of Cadmus’ dragon-sewn men, slain in a fraternal war that prefigures the war of Polynices and Eteocles. This bloodshed would not have at all suited Gower’s message of bard-brought peace (though Cadmus makes an appearance in Gower’s *Confessio*, and I will touch on Gower’s connection between Thebes, fraternal multiplicity, and literacy later in this chapter).

¹⁴⁶ Friedman treats this topic in detail in Chapters 2 and 3.

¹⁴⁷ Friedman, 151. The lion is also connected with David in I Sam 17: 34-35, though the bear and lion are beasts David kills, not pacifies with his harp.

foremost. The Middle Ages also expanded on the increasingly popular Eurydice myth, and the romanticized love quest—successful in *Sir Orfeo* and other versions, while unsuccessful in others—would have drawn fascinating parallels between Orpheus and the *Confessio*'s poet and lover, Amans/Gower. The parallels are even more attractive as we look into what else Orpheus is famous for, for the Eurydice myth is only a small part of the Orpheus legend from antiquity. Orpheus' principle hallmark was the curative power of his music, such that his music charmed animals and even stones and trees, and his music lifted sorrow from human hearts.¹⁴⁸ Lydgate writes that Orpheus' music was "So hevenly and celestial" that it could "Comfort hys [a man's] sorowe to apese," and Christine de Pizan writes that "Orpheus made such melodious sounds on the harp that by the perfectly ordered proportions of his harmonies he cured several maladies and made sad men happy."¹⁴⁹ These passages sound strikingly like Gower's description of Arion, who "putte away malencolie" with the *mesure* of his music (1069).¹⁵⁰ Moreover, the arts and sciences seem to culminate in Orpheus' career: he was a poet of the cosmos who understood the heavenly spheres and the inventor of the alphabet (Friedman, 7, 148). With his curative powers—so obviously echoed in Gower's *Prologue*—and his scientific and literary wisdom, as well as his role as Christly savior and good, Davidian king, Orpheus seems a strong candidate for Gower's bardic savior and his message of peaceful governance.

Gower instead assigns the part to a lesser known bard, culling qualities from Orpheus and giving them to Arion. R. F. Yeager postulated that Gower opted to use Arion precisely because there was less written on him, a "clean slate" for Gower's purposes even as the bard conveyed authority due to his classical fame.¹⁵¹ He was not

¹⁴⁸ Friedman, 1, 149ff.

¹⁴⁹ Friedman, 151, 155.

¹⁵⁰ Friedman, 151

¹⁵¹ R. F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetics*, 240.

entirely a blank-page, however; mythologically speaking, Arion is a one-hit wonder. Less an Orphic savior than a man saved, he is known only for his story of survival at the hands of greedy pirates, who force him to walk the plank, but not before he plays his lyre so beautifully that a rescuing dolphin befriends Arion and brings him safely to shore.¹⁵² This is the tale for which Arion is exclusively known for, yet Gower says nothing of this legend, so one must wonder why Gower would choose this relatively obscure musician and then say nothing about his one claim to fame. The tale should appeal to Gower as an author of the legend of Constance, another virtuous character in mortal peril at sea. Arion's tale likewise has the simplicity of an exemplum that ostensibly would appeal to a poet noted by Elizabeth Allen and J. Allan Mitchell for his poetics of exemplarity.¹⁵³ The myth's moral would satisfy 'moral Gower': Arion's good music goes rewarded, and, in some versions of the story, the pirates get their just desserts and are executed for their attempted murder.

Such rewards and punishments, I feel, are exactly what Gower avoids. In his social vision, peace is not achieved through the *defeat* of opposition but through mutual concord. It is well known that the passage declares Gower's social vision, situating a new sense of past, present, and future with the role of the poet-philosopher presiding over and unifying all. The language of proportion—of *measure*—is the source of Arion's efficacy; the fact that this is also the source of Orpheus' power suggests a stylized rather than localized identity of Gower's bard. Gower's reading of Arion, pared of its traditional content of dolphin and pirates, augmented with borrowed nuances from Orphic legend, is ahistorical in order for Gower to fashion a new bardic figure. The "clean slate" of Yeager's assessment appeals to Gower,

¹⁵² See Peck's notes on lines 1053ff.

¹⁵³ Elizabeth Allen, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); J. Allan Mitchell, *Ethics and Exemplary Narrative in Chaucer and Gower* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004).

perhaps, because the *measure* that applies to music is in turn applied to the *musician*. Just as music must be structured and perfected, so too its creator is fashioned and refashioned until he disappears altogether in Gower's transition from praising the legendary bard whose measured sounds moved all to be still, to the God who steers a teetering state. The bard adrift in the sea gives way to the God at the helm, a shift from saved to savior.

Arion's story—and his voice—never surface in the text, and even as Gower idealizes the measure of music, he seems to be refining his idea of the man who makes that music. Arion is a static emblem of bardic, curative power, and his effacement historically makes him iconic rather than human. It is a very different type of character than those we meet in the actual tales of the *Confessio*. The difference may be in Gower's need to make the man match his *measure*. It is a tall order, and in refining his character, Gower engages in what may be thought of as a kind of alchemical change, in that both are processes of purification and refinement, a science of self-improvement. Both conjure up conflicting notions of fame and shifting, composite identities; just as gold is fashioned through purifying and amalgamating multiple materials, Arion is alchemically one person made of many (Arion-Orpheus-David-Christ). Like one transformed, he ceases to be the Arion of classical lore and resembles Orpheus and finally God; his fame is upheld insofar as his name is invoked, but for all practical purposes he is a different person than the man thrown overboard.

In music, the perfection of the artist is a prerequisite to perfected art. Man's composite body must be harmoniously balanced in order to craft a composite creation. In an early chapter, "from the Part of the Body of the Artificer" from the *Sum of Perfection, or of the Perfect Magistery*, attributed to Geber, the alchemist is required to have a perfect body to conduct his art:

if any *Man* have not his *Organs compleat*, he cannot by himself come to the *Compleatment* of this *Work*; no more than if he were *Blind* or wanted his *Limbs*; because he is not helped by the *Members*: by mediation of which, as ministering to *Nature*, this Art is perfected.¹⁵⁴

Just as Nebuchadnezzar's statue cannot represent glory but only society's destruction, and similarly the pantheon anatomical man in Book 5 represents a flawed religion, so the artist must not be a motley assortment of parts but a healthy body capable to imparting wholeness to his craft.

Arion and alchemy operate on the precision of *measure*, and both are figures who straddle impossible lengths of time. Arion's harping and alchemy's transmutations are the arts of antiquity whose story is one of ambiguity and idealism. For Gower, they are endeavors of praise and signs of an ideal past. Gower's reverence of Arion, however, is tempered by his own awareness of how measure spins out of control and becomes its opposite, and the final prayer that God will steer the ship is both a resignation that humanity is lost if left to its own devices, as well as a slight reference to the Arion myth: a dolphin is good, but a helmsman is better. The qualified praise of Arion is not biting or satirical, but it does show Gower's mind at work, his knack for finding a harmonious social order and marvelous sciences like music but pinpointing their unwieldiness, their precarious instability, in human hands. It is a principle of praise and uncertainty that organizes his poetry, likewise seen in his praise of alchemy, which I explore next. Like his attitude toward fashioning Arion and his *measure*, Gower enhances and elaborates on the merits of alchemy—as though alchemy could be alchemically transformed by Gower's reordering of time that breathes gold into the Age of Iron. His praise is devoid of irony, unlike Chaucer's cynical assessment of alchemy in *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, yet a double voice resides in Gower's text, one that lauds the technical achievement of alchemy even as

¹⁵⁴ Carolyn P. Collette, *Species, Phantasms, and Images: Vision and Medieval Psychology in The Canterbury tales* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 143-4.

human and specifically linguistic limitations impede one's access to the pure scientific process.

Reading the Golden Age in Ovid, Chaucer, and Gower

The Golden Age seems a misnomer, for what made the deep past a golden age was the absence, not the presence, of gold. As Ovid notes early in his *Metamorphoses*, it is the hallmark of the Iron Age to value and mine the wealth at Hell's gates:

...Stygiisque admouerat umbris
effodiuntur opes, inritamenta malorum.
iamque nocens ferrum ferroque nocentius aurum
prodierat; prodit bellum, quod pugnat utroque
sanguineaque manu crepitantia concutit arma.
vivitur ex rapto; non hospes ab hospite tutus,
non socer a genero, fratrum quoque gratia rara est.
inminet exitio vir coniugis, illa mariti;
lurida terribiles miscent aconite novercae;
filius ante diem patrios inquirat in annos.
victa iacet pietas...¹⁵⁵

The bowels of the world were forced
And wealth deep hidden next the gates of Hell
Dug out, the spur of wickedness and sin.
Iron now was in men's hands to bring them bane,
And gold a greater bane, and war marched forth
The fights with both and shook its clashing arms
With hands of blood. Men lived by spoil and plunder;
Friend was not safe from friend, nor a father safe
From son-in-law, and kindness rare between
Brother and brother; husbands plotted death
For wives and wives for husbands; stepmothers
With murderous hearts brewed devilish aconite,
And sons, importunate to glut their greed,
Studied the stars to time their father's death.
Honour and love lay vanquished...¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁵ Ovid, *Metamorphoses Books 1-5*, ed. William S. Anderson (Tulsa: University of Oklahoma, 1997), 1.139-145; 148-9.

Ovid presents a topsy-turvy world in which what literally is below our feet is exhumed and held aloft. Metals rise, piety *iacet* or lies under foot, a topsy-turvy expression much favored by Gower. The rise of metals signals the decay of innocence and the corruption of the familial body, turned against itself as factions fight over material gain. The sciences—summed up in the image of the poison-brewing stepmother as proto-chemist and a son consulting the stars to determine his father’s death—are born of hate; they are not alchemist and astrologer but stepmother and son, for they seek a new identity within the family rather than arcane knowledge. In remaking themselves in the same way that Iron Age man had scored the world with roads and ships and mines, these family members bring their sense of conquest home; murder is the last step in harvesting matter for self-gain. While the Golden Age was not an intellectual era, Iron Age sciences such as metallurgy and astrology are grounded in and enable divisive, human greed.

How Chaucer and Gower portray these intellectual descendents of Ovid’s young astrologer is illuminating. Two ‘clerks’ armed with astrolabes come to mind: Gower’s Nectanabus from Book 6 and Chaucer’s Nicholas from *The Miller’s Tale*. Nicholas is an Oxford clerk, though he is more of a parody of Ovid’s creation than an intellectual. His astrolabe is a status symbol and prop for deception; his astrological prediction of a new Flood is a sham that John the carpenter foolishly believes. Nicholas’ success does not depend upon his consultation of the stars but upon the *appearance* of his having done so.

This is quite different from Gower’s perception of villains engaged in the secretive sciences. Closer in some respects to Ovid’s character than to that of Nicholas, Nectanabus is an astrologer and opportunist, with a charismatic following; his yeomen are described as “trewe as stiel,” an expression that suggests his Iron Age

¹⁵⁶ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, trans. A. D. Melville (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

associations, but in a positive light at odds with Ovid's account (6.1814). Despite his opportunism, Nectanabus' magic is no sham: by witchcraft he perceives a threat to his life and flees to Macedonia. Presenting himself as a "clerk" to Queen Olympias, he uses his astrolabe and his arts to deceive her into sleeping with him, but his power is no deception (1875). Gower's tale condemns Nectanabus' behavior but never questions the power of his magic. Even when Nectanabus gives Olympias and her husband false dreams as a sign of the god's supposed authenticity, the scheme is false, but the magic dreams are not. The illusions of dragons and birds allow Nectanabus to fly great distances and enter dreams; one only wonders why all the chit-chat and hocus-pocus illusions are needed when he possesses such great power and could give him Olympias on any terms he wished. The situation is akin to Prospero claiming that he *needs* Caliban to haul wood, when Ariel serves his master in much more demanding tasks. In Nectanabus' case (and Prospero's), the answer seems to be that he is hooked on the performative nature of his craft and the power of that performance; the more he strings along Olympias and her husband with false visions, the more exciting Nectanabus renders the adultery for himself. Gower, like Ovid, seems to be questioning the use of these hidden arts, but unlike Ovid, Gower does not regret humanity's grasping at knowledge in the first place but critiques what has been done with it.

Ovid's astrologer and poisoner are Cain figures who saw that the materials that lay dormant at humanity's feet and exhumed them to slay their kin. The connection between eras, metals, and the sciences is a significant one in medieval poetry. In *Language and the Declining World*, John Fyler chronicles the Biblical concept of eras leading to decay, a tradition that resounds with different names from Ovid's text but tells the same essential tale. Eden is the locus for human innocence, and murderous Cain is paradoxically the father of the civilizing arts and sciences. The sciences, then,

are burdened with the stain of sinful founding fathers. The combination of Biblical and Classical myth can both be found in Chaucer's short ballade, "The Former Age," in which civilization commits an error of greed when it chooses to "grobbe up" metal:

But cursed was the tyme, I dare wel seye,
That men first dide hir swety bysinesse
To grobbe up metal, lurking in derknesse,
And in the riveres first gemmes soghte.
Allas, than sprong up al the cursednesse
Of covetyse, that first our sorwe broghte. (27-32)

Metals and such geological resources are sinful to access. As Scott Lightsey points out in his recent book, *Manmade Marvels in Medieval Culture and Literature*, Chaucer negotiates between his approval of scientific proficiency and his skepticism toward technology: "Chaucer's representations of rationalized *mirabilia* appear to merge moral concerns raised by the nature of technology with his understanding of technological artifice. Chaucer's representations of *mirabilia* suggest he was caught between technology's positive aspects and the moral decline that unspiritual innovation could suggest."¹⁵⁷ Just because people can mine the earth for metals does not mean they should.

Gower's attitude toward mining is entirely different from Ovid's and Chaucer's description of sophisticated depravity. In Book 4 of the *Confessio Amantis* he speaks of the metals as a natural result of culture beginning with the cultivation of land by Saturn, god of the Golden Age. Cultivated land brings metamorphosis to the earth, and the cultivation of commerce and coinage is Saturn's next accomplishment which depends upon mining:

Bot thing which gifth ous mete and drinke
And doth the labourer to swinke
To tile lond and sette vines,
Wherof the cornes and the wynes

¹⁵⁷ Scott Lightsey, *Manmade Marvels in Medieval Culture and Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 61.

Ben sustenance to mankinde,
 In olde bokes as I finde,
 Saturnus of his oghne wit
 Hath founde ferst, and more yit
 Of chapmanhode he fond the weie,
 And ek to coigne the moneie
 Of sondri metall, as it is,
 He was the ferste man of this.
 Bot hou that metal cam a place
 Thurgh mannes wit and Goddes grace
 The route of philosophres wise
 Controeveden be sondri wise,
 Ferst for to gete it out of myne,
 And after for to trie and fyne.
 And also with gret diligence
 Thei founden thilke experience,
 Which cleped is alconomie,
 Wherof the selver multeplie
 Thei made and ek the gold also. (4.2451-61)

Far from Ovid's and Chaucer's bitter description of human greed, Gower celebrates a golden age of civilization and the founding "philosophres wise" of natural philosophy. Cultivating arts give humanity "mete and drinke," and cultivation of crops is celebrated rather than mourned (Gower in no way suggests the Ovidian Golden Age's diet of acorns is somehow more wholesome a diet), and similarly, in a matter-of-fact, positive tone, Gower lists the achievements of coinage, mining, and alchemy, all linked through Saturn as "the ferste man of this," a euhemerized proto-philosopher, though admittedly his motivations seem mercantile rather than scholastic (2450). Russell Peck notes that Saturn, while typically a malign god and planetary influence, as in Book 5 of the *Confessio Amantis*, can be astrologically benign under Jupiter's planetary influence. His role in agriculture, though, has nothing to do with Jupiter's influence, which in fact violently ends the Golden Age, as Ovid notes:

When Saturn fell to the dark Underworld
 And Jove reigned upon earth, the silver race
 Replaced the gold, inferior, yet in worth

Above the tawny bronze.¹⁵⁸

The fall of Saturn, normally portrayed as evil, reads like a conspiracy theory: Jupiter, usually seen as the darling of gods and men, ruins the Golden Age by casting down its benevolent ruler. Ovid's sly accusation hints that the Roman religion rests on wrong principles, or at least its decadence is laid at Jupiter's door and society's turning away from a more Edenic past. In the *Metamorphoses*, Saturn presides over lands untilled, seas uncut by keels, and communities innocent of the metals beneath their feet. By invoking Saturn's presence in his own text, Gower reveals a conflicting chronology, in which Saturn signifies an age of innocence even as he leads humanity into an age of commerce and discovery. Isidore in Book XVI also notes Saturn's role in agriculture and coinage, and Gower seems to underscore this conflation of the Golden Age with the technology of the Ages of Silver, Bronze, and Iron. It suits Gower's investment in conflating discovery with innocence, and he authorizes technical achievement through the god that Ovid employed to signify its critique.

Thus, Gower's Saturn is not at odds with human advancements but rather the instigator of it, and this supportive environment applies syncretically to the Christian God. Mining and metalwork were skills achieved "Thurgh mannes wit and Goddes grace"; they gain God's approval rather than reveal a Faust-like separation from God. Man's wit and Saturn's wit (mentioned a few lines earlier at 2445) both contribute to complementary ends. The ensuing *wise / wise rime riche* couplet, "The route of philosophres wise / Controeveden be sondri wise," describing the back room of busy scientists (Saturn's research team?), reinforces the skill involved in the day's greatest minds, making discoveries with a dignity denied to the proto-scientists of Ovid's Age of Iron and to the explosion-smearred alchemists at the end of *Part One* of the *Canon Yeoman's Tale*. The Yeoman's sweat could certainly attest to "gret diligence," but it

¹⁵⁸ Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, trans. Melville, 1.115-8.

is a hamster's frenetic diligence on the wheel, not the linear progression in Gower's Saturnine world of cultivated fields and cultivated economies. Metal technologies signify cultivation that shapes nature but also human communities; coinage is not the ruin of society but part of its fruition into a global market. In Ovid and Chaucer, the uncovering of gold signifies the dawn of war, but Gower forgoes this common enough point to dwell instead on the Golden Age as one that was indeed of gold, idealized in Saturn's pacific reign.

The transition from cultivated lands to cultivated monies to cultivated metals (alchemy) flows seamlessly from this enumeration of technological advancements. Indeed, Peck's header, "Alchemy," inserted before line 2457 to commence the section on alchemy, breaks the semantic flow of discoveries yielding discoveries; the first words under Peck's rubric begin mid-thought: "And also" (2457). The alchemical treatise resists separation from the previous discussion on the various inventors of civilizing arts, itself part of a larger discourse on the diversity and efficacy of labor, which in Gower's discourse centers on the cultivation of letters. Thus Gower blends the arts and sciences with his discussion of books and literary fame, of alchemy's skilled synthesis of matter, and of the alchemy of time, in which the past and present merge.

Gower's sense of time proves complex. In the Prologue, he seems to have a reductive outlook of a golden past and corrupted present that suits his social commentary:

Men se the world on every syde
In sondry wyse so diversed,
That it wel nyh stant al reversed,
As for to speke of tyme ago (28-31)

Gower seems invested in a golden past, but Saturn's Golden Age is one that operates "In sondry wyse so diversed" though a profusion of civilizing crafts and alchemy and

engaged in processes of reversal, converting lead to gold: alchemy “worchen be diverse weie” by philosophers who work “in sondri wise” (4.2486; 2532). The more Gower underscores how the past and present differ, the more they resemble one another, a similarity which underscores the importance of alchemy and his insistence on its power to purify and to change time itself.

Poetic and Scientific Extremes

The discussion of alchemy in Book 4 is preceded by Genius’ glowing inventory of discoverers and origin myths (2396-2456). The list paints a reductively rosy picture of these men and women as great inventors, glossing over the sometimes less savory details of their lives. Cham, first in the list and founder of the Hebrew alphabet, was known as an astrologer whose two inscribed columns mimic Moses’ tablets in their presentation of lore that commands human lives.¹⁵⁹ Cham, or Ham, is also known for seeing his father naked and drunk and receiving his father’s curse for this experience. As Gower writes in the *Vox*,

Decidit in mortem Noë iustus, surgit et ille
Nembrot in arce Babel, spernit et ipse deum:
Mortuus estque Iaphet, operit patris ipse pudenda,
Set modo deridens Cham patefecit ea. (6.1215-8)

Noah the just has fallen in death, and Nimrod arises in the Tower of Babel and scorns God. Japhet, who concealed the sins of his father, is dead, but the

¹⁵⁹ Peck, *Confessio Amantis*, vol. 2, Book 4, n. 2399-2400. Andrew Galloway’s translation of Geoffrey of Viterbo’s *Pantheon* reads, “Cham is said to have passed his life in Ninus’ time: Ninus, king of the Ninevites, took his kingdom from him. Cham first undertook to write about astrology, and Ninus expelled him, lest Cham become a king to rebels, and caused all the writings Cham had produced to be burned; for Ninus feared his art, lest his kingdom be destroyed. Cham first wrote down the seven arts that we learn, and through them he had taught philosophers to know the parts of the heavens and to leave them again to others, and after for men to teach them. These arts Cham had written onto long columns, lest they perish either by fire or the engulfing waves; each column was of bronze or brick (*Pantheon* 3, col. 105).”

scoffing Ham now exposes them.

Cham is a significant choice to head Gower's list of inventors, for his vice is his virtue. By exposing what is concealed, he lives by curiosity that aids the foundation of literacy; reading his father, he brings reading to his nation. As James Dean notes, in the *Vox*, Gower laments Cham's degeneracy and sets it in opposition to his father's and his brothers' purity.¹⁶⁰ However, by compacting this *de senectute mundi* trope within a generation, Gower uses Cham's degeneracy and Japhet's purity as a literary figment rather than arguing for a real golden age lost as time progresses. In the *Confessio*, Cham is no longer vilified or set against his betters, who are not mentioned. It is Cham's discovery that is lauded, and Gower's silence on his degenerate side underscores his determination to yield gold from baser elements.

The remaining names continue this careful editing. Cadmus, mentioned second, discovered the Greek alphabet, but he is also the founder of Thebes, a city whose foundation rests on bloodshed. It is even possible that the dragon's teeth sewn by Cadmus in Theban soil represent the Greek letters, an interpretation which connects the violent origin of literacy. Genius seems to have a superficial knowledge of the people he praises, undermining his own assertion that "Al be it so the bodi deie, / The name of hem schal nevere aweie" (2393-4). The names do survive, but the stories and identities behind them, and thus the things that gave them meaning, are blurred and complicated.

The discussion on alchemy slips out as an aside in this list. Naming Saturn as the inventor of coins, Genius digresses on how coins were refined, and hence how metals were mastered by the great alchemists. The mode of introduction, discussing currency (a mundane invention for a god) alongside turning base metals into gold, is of a piece with the list's uneven account listing famous gods and men like Zeuxis and

¹⁶⁰ Dean, *World Grown Old*, 247-8.

Prometheus in the same hall of fame as Jadahel the inventor of fishing nets and Verconius the cook. It bespeaks Genius' unprioritized deluge of information that the reader must sift through all at once, like the butchers and bakers and cooks and cries of "hote pyes, hote!" overloading the senses in the Prologue of *Piers Plowman*.¹⁶¹ The passage on coinage gives a history to alchemy, the result of "philosophres wise" who began their research with more commercial purposes and suits the theme of alchemy: multiplication leading to the singular, sought-for element.

Alchemy, in a sense, emulates Creation, at least as Gower saw both processes: his take on Creation is not *ex nihilo* and thus an unorthodox process of evolution, astral influence, and chemical change. Just as God took "ilem" (hyle) and made the universe with it and gave form to formlessness, so alchemy takes a profusion of stuff—"bodies sevene in special / With foure spiritz joynt withal"—and makes them multiply into a finer element (4.2463-4):

The bodies whiche I speke of hier
Of the planetes ben begonne.
The gold is titled to the sonne,
The mone of selver hath his part,
And iren that stant upon Mart,
The led after Satorne groweth,
And Jupiter the bras bestoweth,
The coper set is to Venus,
And to his part Mercurius
Hath the quikselver... (4.2466-75)

The process has a sanctified stamp of approval, yet the materials here are eerily similar to the listing of body parts, a theme begun in the *Vox* 1 and reworked, as we will see in the next chapter, in Gower's depiction of Nebuchadnezzar's statue in the *Vox* 7 and *Confessio*, and the Greek pantheon in Book 5. There is the same laundry list of bits and pieces, the same listing of base metals, and a cameo appearance from the

¹⁶¹ William Langland, *Piers Plowman, the C-Text*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 1999), Prologue, 227.

pantheon, again flattened into a list, which underscores the fascination Gower has for information that is both intricate yet tidy. Everything has its place, every metal its presiding celestial body. Nebuchadnezzar's statue and the hodgepodge deity in Book 5 reflect the horrible disorder of composite bodies. Here, however, the list shows the link between mundane metals and the greater universe. The informative, scientific tone lends authority to the passage, which aims to explain how, not why, the system operates. There is no curiosity about why certain planets cause certain metals to be created, nor whether any mythological significance can be extracted from these interesting pairings (e.g., Does quicksilver signify Mercury's mercurially clever tongue?). He is very sparse with the connection between astrology and alchemy. For him, the main importance is the interconnectedness between the celestial and terrestrial and the sense that every body has its parent planet.

In his pioneering study on Gower's sciences, George Fox notices that Gower associates Jupiter with brass, not tin, which alchemical writings specify. To Fox this error shows Gower's lack of scientific knowledge. This may reflect Gower's understanding of Jupiter, whose thunder and bombast seems well paired with a shiny, loud metal like brass. However, a more fundamental reason for the brass is that this is the metal found in Nebuchadnezzar's statue. There again introducing brass is something Gower does in spite of tradition, for some accounts give Nebuchadnezzar's statue bronze, not brass. The gold, silver, brass, iron—only clay is missing from the alchemist passage (though not from Chaucer's Yeoman's account), which also adds a few more metals.

This overlap between metals in the Prologue and Book 4 suggestively points to a possible resolution to the discord Gower detects in human civilization. Yeager's book argued for the harmonious power of Arion, and in a sense, alchemy and music bring measure and structure to substance. But what makes the alchemy passage so

interesting is that it revamps the Nebuchadnezzar statue on its own terms, re-evoking its motley base elements and pointing to the possibility of a body of solid, pure gold. Alchemy bears an almost anagrammatical relationship to Nebuchadnezzar's statue and the pantheon of Book 5, by which I mean that the metals of the statue and the gods of the pantheon are contained within alchemy's seven bodies and four spirits. The array of substances might make alchemy seem to emblemize disorder, but like an anagram it rearranges and combines its substances to spell out meaning and even a conversion to something greater than the sum of its parts.

Composite bodies like Nebuchadnezzar's statue and the pantheon in Book 5 are defined by the parts, particularly their extremities. In Book 7 of the *Vox Clamantis*, Gower describes only the head and feet of Nebuchadnezzar's statue; the *Confessio* describes all the body's parts, but the head and feet remain of central importance in recounting a starting and end point in human decline. In Book 5, the body is described from the Minerva's governance over the head to Venus' governance over the genitals—extremities of another sort. The alchemical passage in Book 4 describes another composite body whose extremities are of central importance to the whole. Like Nebuchadnezzar's statue, whose head is praised as the finest material in the whole statue, alchemy promises to work toward that extremity, converting the whole body, in essence, into a golden head:

For as the philosophre tolde
Of gold and selver, thei ben holde
Tuo principal extremites,
To whiche alle othre be degres
Of the metalls ben acordant,
And so thurgh kinde resemblant,
That what man couthe aweie take
The rust, of which thei waxen blake,
And the savour and the hardnesse,
Thei scholden take the liknesse
Of gold or selver parfitly. (4.2487-97)

For thei tuo ben th'extremetes,
 To whiche after the propretes
 Hath every metal his desir,
 With help and confort of the fyr
 Forth with this ston, as it is seid,
 Which to the sonne and mone is leid;
 For to the rede and to the whyte
 This ston hath pouer to profite.
 It makth multiplicacioun
 Of gold, and the fixacioun
 It causeth, and of his habit
 He doth the werk to be parfit
 Of thilke elixer which men calle
 Alconomie (4.2565-78)

These passages reflect both extremities of the body and of time, as well as the extremes to which humanity pursues its desire. The passages promise to locate all metals at the extremities, to refine and uplift them to that lofty position. It is a different approach to harmony. While Arion's music seeks to take polar opposites and bring them to the center, alchemy seeks to push its baser metals from a middling state of being to the extremes that refine their essence.

Truth in Translation: Chaucer's Hoax, Gower's Alchemy

Alchemy is a related technology to the mining of metals, yet with an important difference: ethical debates can hover over whether metals should be drawn from the depths of the earth, but the technology to do so is clearly there. The technology of alchemy, however, is a murky matter, and besides the debate of whether one should transform metals is the underlying problem whether the endeavor is even possible. The Canon's Yeoman has learned by experience that it is not possible: "oure labour is in veyn" (G 777). If the former age was reprehensible in pursuing technological advantages, the current age mucks about in the dirt without uncovering the goods. Chaucer's disgust for the "swety bysinesse" of mining in "The Former Age" matches

the Canon's grotesquely sweaty business and busy-ness: "His forehead dropped as a stillatorie," suggesting his body is an alchemical laboratory producing not elixir but sweat ("Former Age," 28; *CYP* G 580). Chaucer uses bodily processes to lampoon alchemical ones. Chaucer elaborates on this theme lexically by incorporating a gross physicality to the rhetoric of alchemy. Highfalutin terminology abounds in the Prologue and Tale, and indeed alchemical documents are notorious for their abstruse language, but the dirty truth hidden by this language is evident in the materials that alchemists employ:

Oure fourneys eek of calcinacioun;
And of waters albificacioun;
Unslekked lyn, chalk, and gleyre of an ey,
Pouldres diverse, asshes, donge, pisse, and cley (804-7)

The polysyllabic, Latinate rhyme (calcinacioun / albificacioun) suggests austere learning and abstruse knowledge, but the next couplet reveals that materials in this execrable enterprise are dung and piss. The Yeoman attempts "encorporyng" diverse materials into a perfected body, but the result is Babel and the Statue of Precious Metals in the Book of Daniel, which stands upon feet of clay mixed with steel. The Statue represents the failure of human civilization, but it is a resounding success compared to the Yeoman's "encorporyng" of excrement in the pursuit of purification. The metamorphosis of base metals into gold is a mere fiction to dupe the Canon's customers into parting with their own gold, and, after seven years' work, the only metamorphosis the Canon's Yeoman performs is inadvertently to change his formerly ruddy complexion to an ashen and wasted hew. Bitter at his failure and aware of the swindling performed in the name of science, the Canon's Yeoman calls alchemy the "slidyng science" (732). While the Yeoman's language is marked with yearning for a long-awaited entrance into the philosophy of alchemy, the process of becoming a philosopher is one of erosion, stripping the Yeoman "bare" physically and financially

(732). The language which carries alchemy's secrets is only jargon that cosmetically conceals a dissembling practice.

This skepticism was shared by many. In the early fourteenth century alchemy was beginning to be excluded from university curricula, and by 1403 Henry IV placed laws to ban alchemical practices because of its reputation for fraudulence.¹⁶² In the years before this ban, alchemy was a target for moral censure. In the *Mirour de l'Omme*, Gower condemns the alchemist as Fraud personified. He says nothing of alchemy's mystifying processes and instead focuses on its sham practices:

Triche est Orfevere au plus souvent,
Mais lors ne tient il pas covent,
Quant il d'alconomie allie
Le fin orr et le fin argent;
Si fait quider a l'autre gent
Que sa falsine soit verraie...
Je ne say point d'especial
Tout dire et nomer le metall
Que Triche ove l'argent fait meller;
Mais bien sai q'il fait trop de mal,
Q'ensi l'argent fin et loyal
De sa mixture fait falser.
Cil q'au buillon voldra bailler
Vessell d'argent pour monoier,
Lors puet il savoir au final
Que triche ad esté vesseller;
Car son vessell et le denier
Ne sont pas d'une touche egal. (25513-36)

Fraud is often a goldsmith, but then he keeps not his agreement when, by alchemy, he alloys fine gold with fine silver. Thus he makes people believe that his adulteration is pure gold...I know not, and cannot name, the metal which Fraud alloys with silver. But I know well that he commits much evil by adulterating fine honest silver in his mixture. He who tries later to convert his silver vessel at the Mint into coin will find out that Fraud has been the silversmith; for his vessel does not have the same feel as silver coin

¹⁶² Lee Patterson, "Perpetual Motion: Alchemy and the Technology of the Self," *SAC*, 15:1993, 52; Scott Lightsey, *Manmade Marvels*, 101 and n. 48.

In light of this cultural reaction against alchemy, condemned by Chaucer and Gower, it is interesting that Gower writes of it in the *Confessio* with respect and belief. His mini-treatise in Book 4 of the *Confessio* sidesteps the sweaty business so noxious in *The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and Tale*. What he presents, instead, is alchemy as a summation of human enterprise:

And also with gret diligence
Thei founden thilke experience,
Which cleped is Alconomie . . . (4.2457-9)

Diligence, through a process of experience-building experiments, yields Nature's secrets and allows humanity to perfect Natural order. "This craft is wrought be weie of kinde," meaning that alchemy engages with the natural workings of metals, transformed at a slower rate by natural processes (4.2508). The celestial bodies influence the seven metals; what the alchemist does is merely facilitate that process of the transmutacion of base to precious metals. Gower's alchemists do not stink; the alchemist purifies base metals and removes the unpleasant "savour" or "stink" (4.2495, 2557).

Thus, if Chaucer is at pains to satirize the unsavory aspects of alchemy, Gower does the opposite by lauding both alchemy and the dedication of its scientists. As long as the alchemist is diligent at his craft, "it mai nocht faile" (2504). Within this wholesome practice "ther is no fallas inne" (2509). The Yeoman says nothing of the sort, and indeed, part of the complexity of the Chaucer's tale is the Yeoman himself, for he is as false as his alchemy and as volatile as the spirits he seeks to stabilize. An accomplished satirist, Gower could have taken this path and pointed out the injuries committed by charlatans and would-be philosophers, but that he did not attests to the appeal alchemy had for him ideologically. Part of that appeal was the orderly world alchemy presented: it was complex, but it possessed logic and the opportunity for apprenticeship and mastery. Also, as a science and a technology, it operated on

Nature as a model for order; alchemists were invited to imitate natural functions and so participate in a more orderly world. Alchemy purifies Nature and the alchemist.

Gower's pro-alchemy position thus may have struck his contemporaries as naïve or bold. Gower is dismissively treated by Stanton J. Linden in his *Darke Hieroglyphicks* because his text is encyclopedic rather than narrative. This encyclopedic quality once served Gower well in terms of his authority as a scientific writer, so much so that Elias Ashmole in the 17th century *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* regarded Gower the master alchemist and Chaucer as Gower's pupil: Chaucer "is ranked among the *Hermetick Philosophers*, and his *Master* in this *Science* was Sir *John Gower*."¹⁶³ That Gower does not sweat or despair about his wasted complexion perhaps suggested to medieval and early modern readers a calm understanding of his material.

Of course, Gower was not an alchemist, and he was well aware of alchemy's limitations as a viable practice. Late in the section, he does point out that alchemical experiments are likely to end in failure:

Bot for to worche it sikirly,
Betwen the corps and the spirit,
Er that the metall be parfit,
In sevene formes it is set;
Of alle and if that on be let,
The remenant mai noght availe,
Bot otherwise it mai noght faile. (2498-2504)

On the one hand, this failure could result from lack of diligence, reminiscent of Grossteste's Head of Brass, a feat of technology carefully constructed for seven years and then apparently destroyed in one careless moment: "bot for the Lachesse, / Of half a minut of an houre, / Fro ferst that he began laboure / He loste all that he hadde do" (4.239-43). Grossteste's project is difficult but possible (Peck's notes postulate that

¹⁶³ Collette, *Species, Phantasms, and Images*, 135.

the head talked, but the sleeping astrologer missed the message), yet there is no margin for error; his calculations must equal Arion's *measure*.

There is more to alchemy than relentless diligence, however. Gower laments the failure of alchemists in a passage cited by those who equate Gower's skepticism with Chaucer's:

To gete a pound thei spenden five;
I nat hou such a craft schal thryve
In the manere as it is used:
It were betre be refused
Than forto worchen upon weene
In thing which stant noght as thei weene.
Bot noght forthi, who that it knewe,
The science of himself is trewe. (2591-8)

Helen Cooper says that Gower "sums up what seems to have been the orthodox view," but what is important here is how belatedly Gower presents that view, and how he tries to sidestep it.¹⁶⁴ Considering that Gower brings up the discussion of alchemy in the first place because he mentions the origin of minted money, spending five pounds for every one gained casts alchemists as incompetent at best. However, the alchemical treatise tucks that criticism in only after lengthy praise of alchemy.

The fault, ultimately, is neither with human sloth or alchemy's illusory promise, but rather with language. According to Gower, the only reason modern audiences did not see alchemical experiments succeed was that the science's secrets were lost in translation, as the science traveled over time from Egypt to the Latin west. Gower, then, pays tribute to the past achievement of science and contrasts its true if inaccessible formula to linguistic flux. He conveys this linguistic muddle in eight lines of polysyllabic, Latinate words that vaguely convey complex scientific activities. He lists the process:

¹⁶⁴ Helen Cooper, *Oxford Guide to the Canterbury Tales*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 372.

Bot what man that this werk beginne,
 He mot awaite at every tyde,
 So that nothing be left aside,
 Ferst of the distillacion,
 Forth with the congelacion,
 Solucion, descencion,
 And kepe in his entencion
 The point of sublimacion,
 And forth with calcinacion
 Of veray approbacion
 Do that ther be fixacion
 With tempred hetes of the fyr,
 Til he the parfit elixir
 Of thilke philosophres ston
 Mai gete, of which that many on
 Of philosophres whilom write. (4.2510-25)

Medieval authors of astrological and alchemical treatises commonly invoke the indescribability topos on account of the complexity of their topic. In his *De Eodem et Diverso*, Adelard of Bath makes claims of astrology's prognostic powers but states he cannot explain the process due to the book's brevity and the topic's complexity.¹⁶⁵ Difficult language conveys the difficulty of the science. This analogous relationship between dense material and dense language, however, becomes a notorious marker of scientific and linguistic gibberish. Linden notes that "commentaries and attacks upon the alchemists frequently focus on the obscurity of their writing" and their "exotic idiom."¹⁶⁶ Even as Gower lauds alchemy, he underscores this obfuscating language with the eight consecutive Latinate rhymes ending in *-cioun*. Gower lets fly a "distillacion" of rhyme words, boiling down a rhyming text's semantic possibilities to a common denominator rhyme. The effect is Babel: hearing these Latin, polysyllabic rhymes jingle and proceed in a list of irregular pauses and a neglected conjunction between "solucion" and "descencion," the audience is being asked to consider the alchemist's "entencion" even as the listener's attention is increasingly muddled.

¹⁶⁵ Fox, *Mediaeval Sciences in the Works of John Gower*, 54.

¹⁶⁶ Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks*, 33-4.

On a couple other occasions, Gower uses similar polysyllabic rhyme clusters to convey the astrological magic of Proteus and Nectanabus, rhyming such words as *astronomien / magician / calculacion / constellacion* and *equacions / constellacions / conjuncions / recepcions*; the fact that Gower gives his largest such cluster to describe alchemy indicates that this too is a chanting litany rather than a scientific document (5.3082-87 6.1959-62). It serves to convey the appearance of knowledge but not the knowledge itself. This Latinate muddle is Gower's pointed commentary on the limits of Latin learning. Latin translated alchemical treatises from the East, but in the shift from East to West, Latin failed to keep alchemy's secrets alive; their translations dismembered the perfect process to preserve only part of the truth. Gower's Latinate rhymes sound august, but their polysyllabic words reflect the muddle of science—its reduction to hocus pocus—in the hands of the Latin west. When Gower describes Eastern and pre-Roman learning, he describes men of science, including Hermes, Geber, and Avicenna, whose books have been much translated and much circulated, to no avail:

[His] bokes, pleinli as thei stonde
 Upon this craft, fewe understonde;
 Bot yit to put hem in assai
 Ther ben full manye now aday,
 That knowen litel what thei meene.
 It is noght on to wite and weene;
 In forme of wordes thei it trete,
 Bot yit they failen of begete,
 For of to moche or of to lyte
 Ther is algate founde a wyte,
 So that thei folwe noght the lyne
 Of the parfite medicine,
 Which grounded is upon nature.
 Bot thei that writen the scripture
 Of Grek, Arabe, and of Caldee,
 Thei were of such auctorité
 That thei ferst founden out the weie
 Of al that thou hast herd me seie;

Wherof the cronique of her lore
Schal stonde in pris foreveremore. (4.2613-32)

The lore of Egypt and the Near East never reached the West intact; Latin authority fell short of Arabic “auctorité,” those who “ferst founden out the weie.” Latin learning is not a leader but a follower, and it fails to follow its superior predecessors.

The contrast between Latin authority and the mundane reality is a little like Chaucer’s seemingly technical and erudite rhyme of “calcinacioun” and “of waters albificacioun,” processes and abstractions that are given body—too much body—in the “asshes, donge, pisse, and cley” that are part of the alchemical recipe (804-7). The Yeoman, too, offers a rhyming jingle to summarize the four spirits and seven bodies that make up alchemy’s resources:

The firste spirit quyksilver called is,
The seconde orpiment, the thridde, ywis,
Sal armonyak, and the ferthe brymstoon.
The bodies sevene eek, lo, hem heere anoon:
Sol gold is, and Luna silver we threpe,
Mars iren, Mercurie quyksilver we clepe,
Saturnus leed, and Juppiter is tyn,
And Venus coper, by my fader kyn! (822-9)

Lee Patterson points out the “schoolboy character of this inventory,” which reduces secret lore to a mnemonic device (37).¹⁶⁷ The Yeoman cobbles the list together with colloquial turns of phrase, enjambment as chemical contents crowd the lines, and the abrupt shift from spirits to bodies (“The bodies sevene eek, lo, hem heere anoon”). Gower also lists properties, but its more leisurely pace, while not eradicating the jingle noticed by Patterson, makes the performance seem more like a lecture than a ditty by rote.

Thus, Gower shows respect for alchemy, but his text also reveals the limits of language that must be science’s vehicle. It is not Chaucer’s language of deceit, but rather a flaw in language’s ability to convey complex material over time, nations, and

¹⁶⁷ Lee Patterson, “Perpetual Motion,” 37.

history. Gower has long been known for invoking an ideal past and a fallen present, but this scenario is more complex: Latin authority was not authoritative enough to keep alchemy alive. Language is a willing but limited servant in the service of scientific truth. In terms of Nebuchadnezzar's Statue of Precious Metals, the fault rests not with the clay, English toes but rather strong if debased legs of steel.

Gower partly covers up the gaping flaw of Latin learning by praising not Latin science but Latin rhetoric. After praising Arabic learning, Gower attempts to praise Latin learning, but makes an awkward shift from Arabic science to Latin rhetoric:

Bot toward oure marches hier,
Of the Latins if thou wolt hier,
Of hem that whilom vertuous
Were and therto laborious,
Carmente made of hire engin
The ferste lettres of Latin,
Of which the tunge Romein cam,
Wherof that Aristarchus nam
Forth with Donat and Dindimus
The ferste reule of scole, and thus,
How that Latin schal be componed
And in what wise it schal be soned,
That every word in his degré
Schal stonde upon congruité.
And thilke time at Rome also
Was Tullius with Cithero,
That writen upon Rethorike,
Hou that men schal the wordes pike
After the forme of eloquence,
Which is, men sein, a gret prudence. (2633-52)

The passage seems like high praise. Carmen makes a rare appearance—her first in English—after Gower's Latin invocation to her, his only named Muse ("Anglica Carmente metra iuuante loquar" [with Carmentis' aid I will utter English verses]), that opens the *Confessio*, and his attribution of Latin letters to her is noted by Isidore of Seville. As with the Prologue's attention to *measure* as a technical achievement, so in this passage, Latin letters become a science, in which rules are "componed" and

“soned” with precision and concord. The attention to form, in which words are ‘picked’ and placed in their appropriate settings, resonates with Gower’s wider concern for form’s enforming power. The polish of this portrait of Latin letters, however, is a thin veneer. James Murphy criticized Gower for confusing Tullius and Cicero as separate people, an ironic error considering Gower’s praise of the immemorial achievements of Latin learning.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, the fundamental issue and greater blow to Gower’s praise of Latin is the shift in subject matter, from alchemy to letters, science to rhetoric. Even as Gower praises the achievements of Donatus and Cicero and Jerome’s Bible, what is implicit in this passage, when contextualized by the preceding lines of the Latin West’s failure to translate Eastern documents, is that rhetoric window-dresses Latin learning’s same failure to understand science.

Genius focuses on Jerome’s successful translation, leaving the alchemical translators unnamed; even so, he shifts topics one last time with a reference to Ovid:

And after that out of Hebreu
Jerom, which the langage kneu,
The Bible, in which the Lawe is closed,
Into Latin he hath transposed;
And many an other writere ek
Out of Caldee, Arabe, and Grek
With gret labour the bokes wise
Translateden. And otherwise
The Latins of hemself also
Here studie at thilke time so
With gret travaile of scole toke
In sondri forme for to boke,
That we mai take here evidences
Upon the lore of the sciences,
Of craftes bothe and of clergie;
Among the whiche in poesie
To the lovers Ovide wrot
And tawhte, if love be to hot,
In what manere it scholde akiele.
Forthi, mi sone, if that thou fiele

¹⁶⁸ James Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 96.

That love wringe thee to sore,
Behold Ovide and take his lore. (4.2653-74)

Even as Genius seems to be talking about religious and scientific documents, “In sondri forme for to boke,” he shifts the topic to the *magister amoris*, Ovid, whose books of love represent the modern alchemy. Ovid’s remedies contain a transformative power not unlike a chemical process. Overly “hot” lovers need only read to learn “In what manere it scholde akiele” and achieve a chemical balance. Genius springs from this *non sequitur* to some love advice for Amans; in essence he makes all that came before tangential to this more practical form of alchemy rooted in the fires of love. Amans and Genius never look back, but the nature of the digression on alchemy and its embedded critique of Latin learning makes one question the limitation to Ovid’s efficacy for lovers. Latin learning filled pages without content; what makes Genius so sure that reading Ovid will perform the desired change of heart? Genius’ sly advice on how to cool the heart may indicate his foresight into Amans’ confrontation with Venus and how his heart will be radically cooled by an ointment. The juxtaposition of alchemical translations with love poetry points to the divide between authority and experience, the intellectual journey and the one that puts blisters on feet. The alchemical passage indicates Latin learning’s failure to translate science; it is questionable whether Ovid’s text will translate into Amans’ experiences in love.

In conclusion, alchemy is a restorative science engaged in a return to the Golden Age. Like Arion’s transformative music, alchemy works on metamorphosis and similarly offers a remedy for a fallen world. As John Fyler puts it, “if by an Ovidian paradigm, flux replaces the original stability of the cosmos, the alchemist in effect tries to metamorphose things backwards, to find the gold beneath the *superficies* of baser metals in the decaying world. But the fact of the world’s decline is apparent in the alchemist’s method; the quest for the singular through “multiplying” requires

the deception of borrowing gold in the attempt to find it.”¹⁶⁹ It is through paradox that alchemy operates—a backwards solution for a backwards world. Gower seems to have no reservations about this paradox. He opens his English poem to claim that Latinate Carmen will be his guide, thus infusing his English poem with the authority of the Latinate learning she represents, but in Book 4 Carmen heads a catalog of grammarians and orators who achieved greatness yet could not hold the lore of authors who came before them. Gower’s problem is that Latin is a stumbling block in this process; it cannot go backwards and forge a seamless bridge to the past. Confronted with ancient Chaldean, Greek, and Arabic texts, hosts of unnamed Latin readers tried and failed to make accurate translations. The Latin achievement of rhetoric, then, is qualified by this failure to serve as a conduit of truth. Francis Bacon would later write that language is a problematic medium for science, and Gower seems to be approaching this opinion, at least in regards to Latin learning and the loss of a Golden Age of language.

In the next chapter I explore composite bodies and in particular Gower’s rendition of Daniel’s Statue of Precious Metals. Gower’s concerns on the surface are political, but they are also scientific, linguistic, and poetic. Book 4’s treatise on alchemy is not only praise of technology but Gower’s vision of time and the distance between past and present, languages and truth then and now. If Latin learning were located in the Statue of Precious Metals, it would take Rome’s place as the steel legs that are strong yet ungraced with the precious materials—be they metals, languages, or texts—of the past. That learning, married to the vernacular’s clay toes, become the feet upon which the empires of the world precariously stand.

¹⁶⁹ Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 199.

Chapter Four

Nebuchadnezzar and Bodily Babel: Gower's Composite Bodies

What is the opposite of *hat*?
It isn't hard to answer that.
It's *shoes*, for shoes and hat together
Protect our two extremes from weather.

Between these two extremes there lies
A middle, which you would be wise
To clothe as well, or you'll be chilly
And run the risk of looking silly.
—Richard Wilbur, from *Opposites*¹⁷⁰

In a recent series of lectures titled “Christian Materiality,” Caroline Walker Bynum made fruitful connections between material transformations in the natural world—grapes yielding wine, decay yielding bees (from Sampson’s observation in the Bible), blood spontaneously generating from water, serpents from statues—to the mechanical workings of magnets, glass, and alchemy.¹⁷¹ In medieval science, religion, art, and language, Bynum detects “parallel cases” of organic transformation that stem from a different understanding of matter reflected etymologically; matter, *materia*, was etymologically linked to *mater*, the mother, and the corpus was embedded in the process of *corruptum*. These processes of change, charged with both sanctified and fallen forms, reflect an outlook of the composition of things as organic wholes or corrupt. Medieval thinkers sifted through these conflicting valences to understand their world, and Bynum notes that these attempts are reflected in the 13th to 16th century proliferation of miracles of material transformation.¹⁷² Within the devotion toward religious objects lies the paradox that God redeems the material,

¹⁷⁰ Wilbur, *Collected Poems*, 494.

¹⁷¹ Caroline Walker Bynum, Raymond Fred West Memorial Lecturer, Stanford lecture series, “Weeping Statues and Bleeding Bread: Miracles in the Later Middle Ages,” delivered at Stanford University, February 23, 2009.

¹⁷² Bynum, lecture series, “Holy Pieces: Attitudes Toward Parts and Wholes in Medieval Late Devotion,” February 25, 2009, Stanford Humanities Center.

making corruptible matter capable of incorruption. Related to this concept is the belief that pieces of sanctified bodies, as found in reliquaries containing fingers, hands, blood, bone, and other corporeal fragments, are themselves complete, and the reliquaries, says Bynum, “draw attention to parts as parts.” What these reliquaries accomplish is “visual synecdoche,” a miracle of the part embodying the whole, and fragmentation paradoxically reveals a new kind of wholeness, one in which a jeweled, hand-shaped box with a hand inside stands for the glorified body of a saint, or the image of a heart transposed with the diamond shape “mouth” speaking to the onlooker not only represents the five wounds of Christ (heart, hands, and feet), but *is* Christ, in that the pieces represent him and speak for him.

Gower’s fixation on parts and wholes reflects this fascination with the composition of things as well as his fear of disorder in the body. In the previous chapters we have been looking at composite bodies that are unified, yet their discrete elements are underscored. To know a thing by its parts is axiomatic for Gower: he rhymes the parts of words against one another to show the friction between part and whole and insight from pairing part with part or part with whole. He is not content to let gold be gold but must explain the alchemical processes that transmute base metals—parts—into refined ones—wholes. Similarly, as we will see in Chapter 5, he pays attention not to the body as a whole, but in the points of contact between its parts: he navigates the zodiac by examining the stars spread in each body’s head, middle, and feet, and he understands the tribes of Israel by enumerating the mothers of Jacob’s children. I have been exploring the harmony in some of these partitioned bodies, yet Gower also registers his unease with matter, anatomy, and the social body with these metaphors of composite bodies. His turns of language often use bodily inversion to reflect political turmoil; his Statue of Precious Metals reveals what is *not* precious but debased in human history; and his Greek pantheon, portrayed as an anatomical man,

overtly links the composite body with the idol.

Idolatry itself began, writes Gower in Book 5, as a human process of filling in a physical and emotional gap. The first idol was a consequence of lack in the familial body, as a father mourns a dead son and has the son's image publically set up in the marketplace to mitigate private grief at home (1529-40). Like such statues, the composite body becomes a technology of seeming wholeness belying the true fragmentation of humanity's condition. *Materia* and *mater* is a pregnant pairing: a dismembered family may lose a child but can fashion a stone or metallic replacement. Not only are families and nations fragmented but man himself: Gower's fixation of the humors as an anatomical flaw points to man as a composite body who, in his lack of connection with one another and creation, fashions other composite bodies—idols—in an attempt to reconnect with one another and with the divine. Gower's exposition reveals why composite bodies such as Nebuchadnezzar's statue are so flawed, yet so compelling, because they convert Babel to a body; they put a human form, however misshapen, to the human need to be whole.

Hand in Shoe: Gower's Visual Synecdoche

As I note earlier, J. A. Burrow notes that Gower writes about larger events through weighted minute details, as when he records the bloodbath at Constance's wedding by focusing on the desecration of the objects at the table:

The Dissh forthwith the Coppe and al
Bebled thei weren overall. (2.699-700)¹⁷³

This stylistic and cinematic description is Gower's way of thinking about wholes and parts; he focuses intently on a part of the action and let the synecdoche speak

¹⁷³ Burrow, "Gower's Poetic Styles," 248.

powerfully for itself, much like Bynum's visual synecdoche has the part stand for the whole. The dish and cup is a striking example; the pairing comes ready-made as a composite body in and of itself, like bread and butter. Its power lies in taking the simple collocation and distorting it, so that cups are red with blood not wine.

Sometimes Gower twists collocations by inverting relationships, as in this image of Rome's decay:

The wall and al the cit withinne
Stant in ruine and in decas;
The feld is wher the paleis was,
The toun is wast, and overthat,
If we beholde thilke astat
Which whilom was of the Romeins,
Of knythode and of citezeins,
To peise now with that beforne,
The chaf is take for the corn.(Prol. 836-44)

As Helen Cooper notes, Gower frequently employs *parison*, a device in which a line is balanced in this case a balance of contrasts between without and within, field and palace, chaff and corn.¹⁷⁴ The image of ruins overgrown with flora and fauna is a topos from the Bible, applied from twelfth century on by poets such as Hugh Primas to the fall of great cities. For Gower, the sense of a wrongful exchange—of field for palace—was compelling and evoked fears for his own country. What makes his portrait unique, though, is his final comment on exchange: “The chaf is take for the corn.” Like dish and cup, chaf and corn are a pair, but not equals or complements. In fact, they are antithetical, except for the rhetorical phrasing that makes them seem similar words in shape and size and objects taken from the same whole; these implied comparisons make the exchange all the more reprehensible in a mercantile sense. Rome has been cheated of all it should have been, and times “now” have cheated themselves of the greatness of the past. Operating on the gustatory level, the line

¹⁷⁴ Helen Cooper, “Peised Evene in the Balance”: A Thematic and Rhetorical Topos in the *Confessio Amantis*, *Mediaevalia*, Vol. 16, 1993, 116.

mourning the swap of chaff for wheat feels less grave than the preceding lines about the devastated palace. The ruined palace speaks eloquently of the death of an empire. It may seem comparatively off-key, even trivial, to mention that the chaff is the land's new crop, to look upon wasted ruins and focus on food (much like Gower's portrait of the massacre at Constance's wedding depicts a fallen dish and cup rather than the people murdered). Gower's collocation, however, works like salt sown in conquered soil, and in its own way bespeaks the horror of a ruined nation: instead of a palace, field; instead of bread, hunger.

It is a hunger for the past. Gower's present society is often critiqued through this gustatory approach in false exchanges of everyday life and everyday things, as when he speaks of chalk and cheese to satirize the clergy:

Lo, how thei feignen chalk for cheese,
For though thei speke and teche wel,
Thei don hemself therof no del. (Prol. 416-8)

Chalk and cheese is obviously not a collocation but an antithetical pairing; one is food and the other is a cheap imitation to deceive the buyer. The clerics Gower describes are like merchants who swap one material for another and debase their goods for their own gain. However, the process of material transformation is also reminiscent of Bynum's discussion of medieval science and the fixation on change. Science is a discipline to understand these processes, but the clergy's twisted discipline is to deceive others with these false transformations. So enamored was Gower of this chalk-for-cheese expression that he uses it elsewhere in the *Confessio* (2.2340), and even in his *Mirour*. In French, the alliteration is lost—"chalk for cheese" becomes "craie pour fromage," yet the expression remains important for Gower for its sense of a sinister mutation of matter (25302).¹⁷⁵ Significantly, *Triche*, the same personified

¹⁷⁵ *Mirour*: "Qe d'achater soietz bien sage; / Car Triche au point ne se disclose, / Ainçois par sa covertre glose / Te dourra craie pour fromage" [you should be very prudent about buying; for Fraud never reveals himself fully; rather, by his sly flattery he will give you chalk for cheese], 25299-302. I am

evil who performs alchemy, is the figure in the *Mirour* orchestrating this conversion of chalk for cheese. The fluidity of matter that Gower celebrates elsewhere is vilified here, with its power put into the wrong hands.

Gower explores this linguistic and material theme in Book 4, the book of alchemy and the efficacy of labor, with an inversion of chaff and wheat that also speaks of delusion and misguided exchange. Amans is against the notion of traveling far from his lady to win renown and thereby her love; he articulates his fears in similar terms to the fraudulent swap of chalk for cheese and the modern day's chaff for Rome's wheat:

What scholde I thanne go so ferr
In strange londes many a mile
To ryde, and lese at hom therwhile
Mi love? It were a schort begete
To winne chaf and lese whete. (4.1706-10)

These material swaps and processes of material transformation are a rhetorical sub-genre to Gower's trope on the mismatched body, whose parts describe inversion of many forms: flipped hierarchies, an end of the golden age, and uneven exchange.

They have a similar feel as the above examples, but bear bodily metaphors:

Tho was ther unenvied love,
Tho was the vertu sett above
And vice was put under fote.
Now stant the crop under the rote. (Prol. 115-8)

Upon the hond to were a schoo
And sette upon the fot a glove
Acordeth noight to the behove
Of resonable mannes us (Prol. 356-9)

To sen a man fro his astat
Thurgh his sotie effeminat,
And leve that a man schal do,

indebted to Roger Ladd, whose presentation made me aware of the French adaptation of what must have been an English, alliterative proverb. Ladd, "Coupable of such maner falsnesses or trespasses": Gower and the Mercers," 43rd International Medieval Congress, Kalamazoo, MI, May 8, 2008.

It is as hose above the scho,
To man which oghte nocht ben used. (7.4303-7)

These examples show collocations that have been twisted out of shape: crop and root, hand and shoe, hose and shoe. The misadventures in dress and agriculture are more ludicrous than the situation in which a customer buys chalk instead of cheese. Hands wearing shoes and feet wearing gloves have the feel of a jeremiad leavened with silliness, closer to the sartorial bafoonery of Malvolio in his yellow stockings than a satire on greedy swindlers. Likewise, the besotted lover's topsy-turvy state in Book 7 is comically reflected in his hose is showing over his shoe (it is unclear whether his hose is too long for his shoes and poking out unfashionably or whether he has managed to stretch them over his shoes entirely). These examples are composite bodies in miniature exemplifying with a small cameo a disordered state; with the language of head, hands, and feet, they convey bodies at odds with themselves.

In contrast, what a body *should* do is cohere and respect the hierarchy of parts:

For alle resoun wolde this,
That unto him which the heved is
The membres buxom scholde bowe (Prol. 151-3)

This talk of bowing to one's head is a step away from Arion's harmony; the parts are not uniting in laughter and joy at Arion's music but bowing and acknowledging their hierarchical differences. It is an odd, nonfunctional image (a body with parts bowing to the head is a body that cannot function literally) to serve as a metaphor for an orderly society. What Gower seems to be saying is that the parts must be attended to in order to restore the whole. These cameos of upside-down vegetables and hands in shoes seem quirky, but they make sense in the context of Gower's fear of misbehaving factions within composite bodies.

However, for a body to be composite was not inherently negative, as Gower's zodiac attests. Astronomical bodies served as repositories of meaning; they influenced terrestrial affairs and contained multiple and even conflicting properties and areas of

influence. Mercury, for example, is both lazy and diligent:

In boke he schal be studious
And in wrytinge curious,
And slouh and lustles to travaile
In thing which elles myhte availe:
He loveth ese, he loveth reste,
So is he noght the worthieste;
Bot yit with somdiel besinesse
His herte is set upon richesse. (7.759-66)

Ambitious yet slothful, Mercury's self-conflicting qualities led the astrologer Haly to conclude that "Mercury is the planet...of a composite person" [*Mercurius est planeta . . . composite persone*].¹⁷⁶ Richard Kay notes that Haly probably means that Mercury is "composed" and able to bring his conflicting attributes into harmony. This peace-bringing image evokes Gower's Arion, and Kay connects Mercury to Christ: "to a Latin Christian reader the phrase could readily suggest the composite person of Christ," linking Christ's *gemina persona* to Mercury. Elsewhere, Gower critiques Mercury's composite sexual nature, using his leitmotif rhyme on *forme*: "Of sorcerie he couthe ynowh, / That whanne he wolde himself transforme, / Fulofte he tok the forme / Of womman and his oghne left; / So dede he wel the more thefte" (5.940-4). As god of thieves, Mercury uses his double nature to prey upon people. It is for this duality of man and woman, orator and liar, that Gower unwillingly begrudges Mercury a place in the heavens. His conjunctions grumble with resentment: "And yit thei maden of this thief / A god ... Bot yit a sterre upon the hevne / He hath of the planetes sevene" (949-50, 953-4). In Book 7, however, all is forgiven, or at least not mentioned, a restraint which testifies to Gower respect for the function of the planets as composite and ordered.

The planet Jupiter also fosters talent in mercantile endeavors but also the sciences and writing. When Dante treats the heaven of Jupiter in the *Paradiso*, his

¹⁷⁶ Kay, *Dante's Christian Astrology*, 65, 304 n. 178.

Eagle speaks with one voice but looks out from eyes with seven pupils, conveying the many within the one, alluding to Pentacost in which the 70 speak with one voice that is more authoritative as one than the 70 men's voices would be on their own. The multiplicity and wholeness of Jupiter is also at work. Kay quotes Haly again, this time saying that Jupiter is "of handsome appearance and of a composed person" [*composite persone*]; "Given the context, Haly most likely meant a 'tidy person,' one whose person was 'well ordered,' but the Latin adjective *compositus* nonetheless has as its primary meaning something that is 'composed of, made from, several parts or ingredients,' which could readily suggest the device of having the Eagle be so formed."¹⁷⁷ In Kay's analysis, Dante perceived the composite nature of the gods but saw this attribute as a strength and material suitable for his *Paradiso*.

Astronomical composite bodies are perhaps given their fullest expression in what Voigts calls the "ubiquitous" image of the zodiac man, who stood for cosmic order in the universe and in man as a microcosm.¹⁷⁸ In manuscript illuminations, the zodiac man stands naked, clothed only with twelve astrological images, including a ram perched on the head, twin boys hanging on the arms, and a scorpion draped as a loincloth. The twelve signs are positioned over the body parts which they influence—Aries governing the head, Taurus the neck, and so on, ending with Pisces governing the feet. One purpose of this anatomical man was to guide doctors in caring for their patients' bodies at the appropriate times, to avoid malevolent influences and solicit positive ones. Hence Chaucer's Doctour of Phisik knew when and how to care for his patients:

For he was grounded in astronomye.
He kepte his pacient a ful gret deel
In houres by his magyk natureel.
Wel koude he fortunen the ascendent

¹⁷⁷ Kay, *Dante's Christian Astrology*, 196, 342 n. 63.

¹⁷⁸ Voigts, "Bodies," 47.

Of his ymages for his pacient. (*GP* 414-8).

However, the image, like those of *mappaemundi*, is not mere a medical aid but a spiritual expression reflecting the medieval sense of interconnected natures.

Composite bodies served to locate points of correspondence between the universe and its human inhabitants, between planets and terrestrial climates or zones, between astral movements and the cycles of the world. While Gower does not specifically include the zodiac man, his astronomical treatise in Book 7 reflects that sense of the many minute parts that compose the universe; though the universe is large, it too is a body, and humanity is an integral part of it.

Despite this positive, even sacred sense of the cosmic, composite body and the harmonious merge of the microcosm and macrocosm, the body could also sicken into corruption or exemplify disorder, as Gower's hand in shoe and similar expressions show. If Book 7 reflects humanity's connection to the universe in ways that affirm humanity and the poet's art to bridge these connections between man and God, the Prologue and Book 5 show Gower's anxiety about these same pursuits.

Nebuchadnezzar's statue is Babel with a human shape, the composite body that positions England as rooted in corruption and England's poet not as an Arion figure but one who prepares his people for the last chapter of apocalyptic ruination. Later, in Book 5, he presents the Greek pantheon as a twisted zodiac man that deceives worshippers. Gower presents different ways of looking at the composite body as ideal and danger: the composite body contains the diverse energy of creation in one form, but it can also amount to idolatry. Nebuchadnezzar's Frankenstein is smashed, the Greek pantheon is only mocked, but both show the quasi scientific patina on these forms echoing alchemy and astronomy. Both of these negative composite bodies are ways in which Gower explores division, consequences, and human desire in fashioning patchwork selves.

Nebuchadnezzar's Monster of Time

The composite body is central if not to Amans' love plot than to the framing narrative Gower provides in the Prologue and the conclusion to Book 8. In the Latin colophon to the *Confessio*, Gower specifically makes Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the Statue of Precious Metals, or Monster of Time central to the *Confessio*, his "tercius liber":

Tercius iste liber qui ob reverenciam strenuissimi domini sui domini Henrici de Lancastria, nunc Derberie Comititis, Anglico sermone conficitur, secundum Danielis propheciam super huius mundi regnorum mutacione a tempore regis Nabugodonosor usque nunc tempora distinguit

This third book, which is fashioned in the English language on account of reverence to the most vigorous lord Henry of Lancaster, then Count of Derby, distinguished historical times according to the prophecy of Daniel concerning the transformation of the kingdoms of this world from the time of King Nebuchadnezzar up until now . . . " (Trans. Andrew Galloway)

Some scholars feel that Gower is misappropriating his own poem with this undue prominence given to Nebuchadnezzar's dream from Daniel chapter 2 of the Statue of Precious Metals, which occupies only a portion of the Prologue.¹⁷⁹ Gower has given us some indication of the dream's importance with the text's illustrations, for he is thought to have had a hand in the manuscript production. As Jeremy Griffiths notes, the Statue of Precious Metals illustration was the main constant in the manuscript's program of illustrations.¹⁸⁰ Only 4 out of 27 manuscripts in Griffiths's study do not feature the statue or have a space reserved for it. Even the portrait of Amans kneeling

¹⁷⁹ Joel Freddell, "Reading the Dream Miniature in the *Confessio Amantis*," *Medievalia et Humanistica*, ed. Paul Clogan, No. 22, Rowman & Littlefield, 1995, 68; Derek Pearsall, "Gower's Latin in the *Confessio Amantis*," in *Latin and Vernacular: Studies in Late Medieval Texts and Manuscripts*, ed. A. J. Minnis (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1989), 24-5.

¹⁸⁰ Jeremy Griffiths, "Confessio Amantis: The Poem and Its Pictures," in *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. A. J. Minnis (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1983), 163-79.

before the Confessor never held the same status.

Nebuchadnezzar's image as text and illustration was widely disseminated in a variety of exegesis and texts, from the twelfth-century Lambeth Bible, fourteenth-century Guillaume de Deguileville's *Pelerinage de l'âme*, and fourteenth-century Guillaume de Machaut's *Remede de Fortune*.¹⁸¹ The statue's prominence, then, owes something to this tradition, but it also accommodates Gower's fascination for the composition of things and the way parts define the whole; with the statue he can experiment with the bodily metaphor and do something quite remarkable with it beyond the paradigm inaugurated by John of Salisbury, who saw the king as the head and the laborers as the feet of the social body.¹⁸² As Gower describes it, the statue's form though impressive is compromised, deformed, and vulnerable. The motley elements of composition—the gold, silver, brass, iron, and clay—signify disorder and division, which no rearrangement can amend. The stars can be divided to allow us to discern their significance; once pieced apart, Nebuchadnezzar's statue has nothing to teach but humanity's own ruination mirrored in the broken statue's body. This mode of composite imagery to project Gower's social imagination is central to Book 7 of Gower's *Vox Clamantis*, which contains the same statue. His description of the statue there heavily influenced the how he wrote about the 1381 Rebellion in Book 1, and these two books gave him a new form of social critique in the Prologue to the *Confessio*. In both the *Vox* and the *Confessio*, Gower fixates on the statue's bits and pieces; he reduces the whole to its parts and in mapping the fragments cannot make the statue whole again. This focus on the motley composition is his poetic way of describing discord, but Gower's social imagination changes over time. In the *Vox* he shows us a ruin and nostalgically describes the golden head which the lower orders

¹⁸¹ For discussion and image, see Michael Camille, *The Gothic Idol: Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 281ff; and Freddell, 61-94.

¹⁸² For John of Salisbury, see Camille, *Gothic Idol*, 284.

villainously destroyed. James Dean read the statue as a then versus now—a “jadis . . . mais ore”—commentary that mourns a lost golden age.¹⁸³ While this interpretation applies well to the *Vox*, it does not apply to the *Confessio*. There, the statue is an idol of many metals, which he pieces apart with an iconoclast’s fervor, and a Monster of Time—of all time, then as now. The shift from ruin to idol is an important revision because it puts the blame on empire, its golden head not so “worthi” as it initially seems.

Although the *Vox*’s account of the Statue of Precious Metals, found in Book 7, is from early in Gower’s career, it is an experimental piece of writing that adapts the image to lament social problems and the moral decline of Gower’s day. He withholds the Biblical context from Daniel, Chapter 2. There is no dream, no interpretation by Daniel, no warning of God’s impending doom—only the statue itself interests Gower, and he modifies this statue to conform to his vision of a self-destructive society. In Gower’s treatment, the God-mandated stone that smashes the statue to powder is superfluous, for the statue is already ruined:

Nunc caput a statua Nabugod prescinditur auri,
Fictilis et ferri stant duo iamque pedes:
Nobilis a mundo nunc desinit aurea proles,
Pauperies ferri nascitur atque sibi. (*VC* 7.5-8)

The golden head of Nebuchadnezzar’s statue has now been cut off, yet the two feet of iron and clay still stand. The noble, golden race of men has departed from the world and a poor one of iron has sprung forth from it¹⁸⁴

In many medieval illustrations, such as in the Lambeth Bible, the Statue of Precious Metals is an impressive, imposing figure, towering over the king whose open eyes stare in fear and wonder.¹⁸⁵ Gower strives for a totally different, pared-down

¹⁸³ Dean, *The World Grown Old*, 236.

¹⁸⁴ All translations from the *Vox Clamantis* are by Eric Stockton, *The major Latin works of John Gower* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962).

¹⁸⁵ See the image of the Lambeth Bible in Camille, *Gothic Idol*, 282.

representation, by describing only a corpse-like, decapitated body. Headless but still standing, it is an image of devastation and impoverishment. Its one mark of value, its golden head, signifies the golden race of men, and Gower declares that the modern age is cut off from this past era. The statue is not ruined from an outside force on God's command, but rather because of its own degenerative process of reverse alchemy, a false fecundity in which iron is born (*nascitur*) from gold and thereby debases and destroys the statue. Reminiscent of Cadmus and his dragon-tooth sown men, there is something Theban about this race of iron men springing to unnatural life and violence. In this iron age, though, there is no Cadmus to stop the crop of men from doing more violence. Cadmus founded a kingdom, but there is no kingdom here, only a ruin to testify to a nobler, lost past.

In this passage, Gower focuses solely on the statue's extremities. He does not mention the silver torso and arms or the brass stomach. He only focuses on the top and bottom of the body and the most and least valuable metals, gold and iron, as well as clay, the most base material of all and, this being a statue appearing before the king as though animated, the most evocative of golems, monsters of clay animated by the God-mimicking magic of life-giving words.¹⁸⁶ This fixation on the extremes and extremities is not unlike the process of alchemy, which aims at achieving the "Two principal extremities," gold and silver; the other metals are only worth considering insofar as they can achieve this statue as extremes (4.2489). In the *Vox*, the focus on a bodiless head and feet allows Gower to present a simple moral dichotomy: the head is good, the feet are bad. In this reductive system, he idealizes the statue's golden head, the victim of an aggressive mob of iron descendants. Mankind loses its nobility from a sinister form of reverse alchemy, in which gold becomes iron; the First Ovidian

¹⁸⁶ For a brief description of the medieval golem and other automata, see Karen Jolly, "Medieval Magic," 51.

Golden Age of innocence suddenly gives way to the Fourth, an Iron Age in which men are hard, greedy, and treacherous.

Book 7 opens with the conflict between the old and the new, the latter being debased and unworthy of its predecessors. With the statue, Gower underscores not steady but abrupt change from gold to iron, a violent upheaval that seems to foresee the Rebellion of 1381. The immediately subsequent age of clay shows the consequences of that coup in terms of loose sexuality and shifting roles:

Vltima per terras superset modo fictilis etas,
Vnde pedes statue dant michi signa fore...
Fit quasi nunc mulier hominis dominus que magister,
Vir fit et ancilla subdita, prona, pia:
Debilis in fortem ruit et vecordia vincit,
Qui foret et sapiens, fictilis ipse cadit.
Preuia dum clerus Veneris vexilla subibit,
Iam Venus a tota gente tribute petit...
Nunc licet alterius sponsam quod quisque frequentet
Est status ingénué, dicitur illud amor...
In causa fragili sic causat fictilis etas,
Quo nunc de facili frangitur omnis homo. (VC 7.135-6, 151-6, 159-60, 173-4)

The last age, that of clay, is at hand throughout the world. The feet of the statue furnish me signs of it . . . It is as if the female has now become the lord and master of the male, and the gentle, submissive, and compliant handmaiden has become the man. Weak folly assails and conquers the man of strength, and the man who should be wise falls, being made of clay. Because the cleric marches under the guiding banners of Venus, she now exacts tribute from all his people . . . Now it is permissible for every man to dance attendance upon another's wife, and this is called the noble rank's "love" . . . Thus does this age of clay complain in its feeble condition, for every man is now easily broken to pieces.

The topsy-turvy revolutions in the passage recall Alan of Lille's grammatical play and gender inversion at the opening of *De Planctu Naturae*. Alan bewails the shift from the manly, dactylic foot to the emasculating iambic; the active verb to the passive; the "he" to the "she."¹⁸⁷ He describes homosexuals as though they think they are doing

¹⁸⁷ Alanus of Lille, *De Planctu Naturae*, ed. N. M. Häring, *Studi Medievali*, terza serie, 19.2 (1978), 797ff. *The Complaint of Nature*, transl. by James Sheridan, metrum 1, page 67.

something elaborate and splendid with language when they speak barbarisms. Gower draws on Alan's discourse for his description of adultery and reversed gender roles, in which women become men and in which upright, presumably English men and women act like the loose French, whose "Gallica peccata" or French sins infect English more; not only is gender reversed, but nationality and culture (157). Folly conquers strength, and Venus employs the clergy, in wording that prefigures Genius. The change in the statue's materials parallels these reversals, particular that of gender; both transformations show that the body ceases to be itself (golden and male) and debases itself with illicit couplings of materials and sexual pairings. Just as Alan laments the shift in dactylic to iambic feet, so Gower laments the Statue's brittle feet, hardly suitable for dancing.

Though the Statue has an attractive, golden head, its decapitation and its pairing with iron and clay feet prompt Gower to compare society to a figure with a maiden's head and serpent's tail:

Sic animus Sathane gerit aspectum Gabrielis,
Est caput ancille, cauda set anguis erit (VC 7.193-4)

Thus Satan's spirit wears the look of Gabriel; he has the head of a maiden but the tail of a serpent.

For this hybrid figure, Gower draws from Horace's mermaid from the opening of the *Ars Poetica*. Horace mocks such fanciful, hybrid shapes as "aegri somnia," a "sick man's dreams," but Gower (as we well know from *Vox* 1) is fascinated by such monsters.¹⁸⁸ They reflect his mingled fascination for and revulsion at disorder, sins against language, and social discord. Inversion, however, has come full circle. First, Gower criticizes the age of clay through its effeminate feet, unfit to support the body, yet he then claims that the face is feminine and the tail is masculine. The beautiful

¹⁸⁸ Horace, *Ars Poetica*, translated by Casper J. Kraemer, *The Complete Works of Horace* (New York: The Book League of America, 1938), 397, line 7.

head, golden and male, is now a woman's head, and the clay feet belong to a serpentine male. This maiden-headed Satan disguised as Gabriel is both hybrid and hermaphrodite, beguiling victims with his female face but concealing his suggestively male tail. Gower has written of such creatures before in his *Mirour de l'Omme*, in which the daughters of Satan

Naiscont du merveillous semblant;
Car de nature a leur naiscant
Trestous sont mostre hermafodrite:
Sicome le livre m'en recite,
Ce sont quant double forme habite
Femelle et madle en un enfant:
Si noun de femme les endite,
Les filles dont je vous endite,
Sont auci homme nepourquant. (1024-32)

were born with strange appearance, for at birth by nature all were hermaphroditic monsters. As the book tells me, these are when a double form, female and male, lives in a child. If I lay on them the name female, the daughters of whom I am telling you are nonetheless also males.

The age of clay is an age of malleability that evokes loose sexuality and fragmentation. It is self-defeating growth, just as being a hermaphrodite or a hybrid is actually less than being a creature of one gender and one species. Through this imagery Gower simultaneously comments upon the hypocrisy and victimization of those in this society. For the original Hermaphroditus, the hybrid combination is forced upon him; likewise, Philomela, a female face with a tongue described as a serpent's tail, is made a hybrid against her will; in the case of the statue, the golden head is forced to share a body with baser elements, before it is cut off by these lower members.

Writing about Nebuchadnezzar's statue in Book 7 prepared Gower for Book 1, on the Rebellion of 1381; he uses this same language of heads and feet as Frankensteinian terms to articulate social division. Just as a maiden's head can be attached to a body with a serpent's tail or a golden head can be chopped off, the

allegorized beast peasants in Book 1 can construct monstrous bodies for themselves. *Vox* 1 is a tour-de force of decapitations, body-snatching, and head and feet inversions. Numerous times the rebels are described as limbs and feet who chop off heads to gain their power (1.1054; 836). For example, when the peasants attack and decapitate the Archbishop of Canterbury, the murder is described in a form reminiscent of Nebuchadnezzar’s decapitated statue, “O maledicta manus caput abscisum ferientis!” (“O cursed hand carrying the severed head!” [1.1129]). The head is described as quivering much as Philomela’s tongue did in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, and the hearkening back to the opposition between feminine and masculine again gestures at a monstrous rape and hermaphroditic hybrids. Gower laments this topsy-turvy social order several times with this language of the foot trampling the head, as in his description of the fall of the Tower: “cecidit fragili sub pede forte caput” [“by chance the top fell under a weak foot”]. (1.1760). It is not unlike some of his expression of inverted crops from the *Confessio*’s Prologue.

Unlike some readers who see the commonality in Nebuchadnezzar’s statue in *Vox* 7 and the *Confessio*, I would argue that the nostalgia in the *Vox* becomes ambivalent in the *Confessio*. Clay is a lesser material but also fundamental: it is the stuff by which God made man, and it is clay, not gold, that Christ mixed with his saliva with clay—together a symbol for the incarnate Word—to spread on a blind man’s eyes, in so doing teaching others a lesson in humility and grace.¹⁸⁹ It could be said that clay is involved in God’s plan for man, but gold is man’s plan for himself. In the *Confessio*, the golden head is rendered a problematic component of a mismatched body. The *Vox* and *Confessio* differ in the shift from the *Vox*’s warring dichotomies—

¹⁸⁹ Sarius of Arles wrote, “What is saliva mixed with clay, except the incarnate Word? That blind man presented the whole human race, and, therefore, the saliva was mixed with clay, and the blind man was made to see: the Word became incarnate, and the world was illumined.” Sermon 172.3, in *Ancient Commentary on Scripture: New Testament IVa, John 1-10*, ed. Joel C. Elowsky and gen. ed. Thomas C. Oden (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, (2006), 325.

past and present, gold and clay, male and female—to the *Confessio*'s a more complex image of multiplicity. Instead of two points of past and present, Gower explores all human history; instead of gold and clay, Gower presents all the statue's motley materials; instead of male and female contending for power, Gower shows the more complex series of empires at war throughout human history. The figure embodying this complexity is the Monster of Time, not a simple figure of monstrous present times, allowing a forlorn poet to harken back to a lost golden age, but monster whose contributors span the ages. The Monster of Time offers both a chronological view of history and all the ages of man's empires seen at once from a divine vantage point outside of time. The distanced perspective reveals not a golden age lost but a human history misguided. Its vanity to forge this body is an act of hubris and idolatry.

The theme of idolatry is brought out in the greater dependence upon the story's biblical setting in the *Confessio*'s version, the effect of which removes all the nostalgia that Gower's *Vox* invests in the golden head and replaces it with castigation for the entire image as an idol deserving destruction. Instead of the *Vox*'s all-knowing narrator and satirist using the statue to express the error of his own society's decline, Gower presents the statue in a fuller, story format to bring out these themes of idolatry and decadence that are a part of all human history. Unlike the book of Daniel, in which Daniel proves his gift of prophesy by telling the dream to Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuchadnezzar relates his dream in full to Daniel. This narrative strategy lets us see the statue through the eyes of Nebuchadnezzar, who beholds the image and describes it as an idol gone wrong:

... “Abedde wher I lay,
Me thoghte I syh upon a stage
Wher stod a wonder strange ymage.
His hed with al the necke also
Thei were of fin gold bothe tuo;
His brest, his schuldres, and his armes
Were al of selver, bot the tharmes,

The wombe, and al doun to the kne,
 Of bras thei were upon to se;
 The legges were al mad of stiel,
 So were his feet also somdiel,
 And somdiel part to hem was take
 Of erthe which men pottes make.
 The fieble meynd was with the stronge,
 So myhte it wel noght stonde longe.
 And tho me thoghte that I sih
 A gret ston from an hull on hyh
 Fel doun of sodein aventure
 Upon the feet of this figure,
 With which ston al tobroke was -
 Gold, selver, erthe, stiel, and bras -
 That al was into pouldre broght,
 And so forth torned into noght.” (Prol. 602-24)

The dream abed is Nebuchadnezzar’s vantage point beyond time allowing him a glimpse of the future ages of human empire seen as parts of the same social body. The metals, unlike the *Vox*, are more varied, the bodily parts represented more mixed than the *Vox*’s statue and even the maiden-headed, serpent-tailed menace.

Nebuchadnezzar, absent in the *Vox*’s account, lies in bed; asleep to his sins, he dreams gawping at the looming statue above him, much like Scrooge in his nightgown and cap gawps at the Ghosts of Christmas Past, Present, and Future, as portrayed in Sol Eytinge’s 1869 emblematic frontispiece to the *Christmas Carol*.¹⁹⁰ Scrooge and Nebuchadnezzar are not such a random pair: both treasure their gold and both experience visions that take them across time for their moral benefit. While gold in Nebuchadnezzar’s dream is presented as the most valued of the statue’s materials, Gower offers no statement that it is good, only that the statue as whole is unstable: “The fieble meynd was with the stronge, / So myhte it wel noght stonde longe.”

Unlike the list of alchemical materials in Book 4, designed to educate the listener and

¹⁹⁰ Eytinge creates an image drawn from Scrooge’s three encounters in different parts of the text; the three spirits seen at once and adjacent to one another, especially with the Ghost of Christmas Future shadily hidden beside the giant Present, is a kind of composite body of different spirits and different times. Paul Davis, *The Life and Times of Ebenezer Scrooge* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), fig. 37, page 77.

bring a deeper understanding of nature and scientific processes, Nebuchadnezzar's list of metals and body parts cobbles together only an object with human semblance, which is summarily destroyed. The profusion of materials is the sterile pantheon of man's self-worship and the ambition of empire.

The rhyme of *stage* and *ymage* underscores the link between images and idolatry, for idols are objects raised on a stage or pillar (though in the illustrations the hulking figure takes the entire vertical space of the image without room for a pillar—he seems more like an apparition, as Camille has commented).¹⁹¹ Camille has pointed out that in the Middle Ages a statue's motionlessness indicated its permanence and power, but this stillness could also indicate its helplessness at the whims of human hands or bird droppings.¹⁹² Nicolette Zeeman takes this point further and discusses the sterility of the idols atop pedestals in Chaucer's *House of Fame*.¹⁹³ Gower is doing something similar here in emphasizing the image on a *stage*, characterizing the statue as an immobile, sterile object. Its immobility only draws attention to the fissures in which different metals touch.

Gower is closer to his Biblical source in this retelling than in the *Vox*, and he has the stone smash the statue to powder. This fuller retelling allows Daniel, in turn, to put God's destroying stone on a pillar:

The ston, which fro the hully stage
He syh falle on that ymage (Prol. 651-652)

The mountain, described as “the hully stage,” echoes Nebuchadnezzar's rhyme and shows the two objects, idol and icon, in opposition to one another. There may even be a pun on hilly and holy, stressing the icon over the idol. As Michael Camille has

¹⁹¹ Camille, *Gothic Idol*, 287.

¹⁹² Camille, *Gothic Idol*, 287.

¹⁹³ Nicolette Zeeman, “The Idol of the Text” in *Images, Idolatry, and Iconoclasm in Late Medieval England*, ed. Jeremy Dimmick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 43-62. See also my fifth chapter.

shown in *The Gothic Idol*, there are many depictions of idols falling from their pillars when God reveals Himself; this is especially in the depictions of Christ and the fall of idols in Egypt, from the Pseudo-Matthew, which W. O. Hassall deems “the commonest apocraphal Infancy legend and according to Mâle the only one retained by the artists.”¹⁹⁴ Gower wrote of such an event in his *Mirour de l’Omme*,

Car les ydoles tresbucheront
En tous les temples u q’ils eront,
Et lieu a ton chier fils doneront,
Q’a sa puissance resister
Ne poent, ainz par tout trembleront (28290-4)

For the idols fell down in all the temples—wherever they were—and gave way to your dear Son, for they could not resist His power; on the contrary, they trembled.

With Nebuchadnezzar’s statue, Gower gesturing at this tradition of idolatry and iconoclasm, and his enumeration of the different metals allows him to make a world-weary litany of the ceaseless conquering and empire building that leaves the world increasingly brittle, until Gower’s England stands in the feet’s old toes, the last and most fragmented phase before all is smashed to powder.

Writing of the idol as a composite body is Gower’s way of pointing to the human manufacturing of the sacred. The process mimics God’s construction of the stars and even the process of refining base metals through alchemy. Gower puts idolatry on the same plane to show the composition of the object and its lack of cohesion. Unlike the portrait in the *Vox*, in the *Confessio* the whole statue is described, part by part. There is a definite pecking order from gold, silver, brass, iron, and down to clay, which suits Gower’s argument that the world grows worse over time, but the effect is more gradual, a social decline in increments rather than a sudden

¹⁹⁴ For illustrations of idols falling before Christ and Mary, see Camille, *Gothic Idol*, figs. 51, 70, 96, 97, 117. See also the fourteenth century *Holkam Bible Picture Book*, ed. W. O. Hassall (London: Dropmore, 1954), folio 15. The quotation is from his commentary on this plate, page 95.

fall. Yet unlike the *Vox*, the *Confessio*'s statue's fall is not a tragedy due to the lust, greed, and rebellion of the lower members of the body. Instead, its many metals signify a body at odds with itself, a house divided that cannot stand, and its flaws and fragmented nature begin with the golden head. In the superficially glowing report of the Babylonian kingdom, Daniel says the head signifies

A worthi world, a noble, a riche,
To which non after schal be liche (633-634)

On the one hand, Daniel says gold signifies a “worthi” world, more precious than that of silver, brass, and so on, but the richness of gold signifies an end to the age of innocence and the dawn of human ambition and empire building. Gower notes these flaws as well—not overtly, but in his lengthy discussion of the ages of man, he notes the bloody upheavals of these empires, as fragmented as the statue which represents them. Balthazar is murdered; the Persians are destroyed by the Macedonians, who in turn fight each other after Alexander's death; and Rome becomes so decadent that it abuses the church and degenerates into ruins. Babylon's kingdom is not exempt from this cycle of pride and violence, nor does Gower see it through rose-tinted glasses:

Of al the world in that partie
To Babiloyne was soubgit;
And hield him stille in such a plit,
Til that the world began diverse. (674-677)

With its people “soubgit” to “such a plit” as Babylonian rule, this world is not a portrait of a happy golden age. The ten-line description of Babylon sets a pattern for the subsequent empires, which hold the world in subjection before their own violent demise. Deanne Williams writes,

The Prologue to the *Confessio Amantis* holds Nebuchadnezzar up as the source for the chaos, division, and most importantly mutability that wrack the contemporary world. . . .Gower goes on to describe how the world has been weakened, not only by Babylon's imperial power . . . but also . . . by its subjection to the principle that Babylon represents: conquest and empire-

building, followed by inexorable decline.¹⁹⁵

The golden head, then, can be read as the origin of civilization's woes and the first piece of an idolatrous puzzle millennia in the making.

Though Ovid portrays the first era as one of innocence, in Gower, *all* the ages are characterized by empire and subjugation; the only thing that changes is that the world is increasingly worn out by this tired tale of domination, upheaval, and fragmentation, and this fatigue is conveyed through the increasingly long descriptions of war and social division. As Gower puts it: "The world empeireth every day" (Prol. 833). The world *worsens* every day, but the pun on "empeireth" shows that the *empire* is the means by which the world grows worse. This critique of empire is why Gower enumerates the list of metals and the empires they symbolize. By recounting the history of the world in terms of these metals and treating all parts of the statue with none left out, he belabors the motley display, about as monstrous as the hybrid rebels from *Vox I*. Like Dante's Statue of Precious Metals, which leaks tears from its fissures, the points where different metals touch are grotesquely mismatched. It is no wonder Nebuchadnezzar did not know how to interpret such a self-conflicting form. Its golden head is an object of idolatry, its feet are worthless, the other parts are in between. It fragmentation marks it as a half-baked god.

Gower's Statue of Precious Metals is never called an idol *per se*, but other sources suggestively portray it as such. The north rose window at Chartres cathedral, discussed in Michael Camille's *Gothic Idol*, shows Nebuchadnezzar and his Statue of Precious Metals among a group of evil idolaters; the image's crown suggests its idolatrous status.¹⁹⁶ Another example discussed is the illustration from the Lambeth Bible, with an imposing statue similar to those in the *Confessio* manuscripts, links the

¹⁹⁵ Deanne Williams, "Gower's Monster," in *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages: Translating Cultures*, ed. Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Deanne Williams (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 131.

¹⁹⁶ Camille, *Gothic Idol*, 285.

two images from Daniel 2 and 3 in a causal relationship, as though dreaming of the one led Nebuchadnezzar to the creation of the other. At the very least, the *Confessio's* Statue's status is ambivalent. Like the Lambeth Bible illustration, it is visually striking, a multicolored body with its head colored in gold leaf, another indication of his profane aping of golden halos crowning sacred images. The statue in the *Confessio's* illustrations is large for an idol; it towers over the king in his bed. But the image, freakish in size and lacking human verisimilitude, is obviously a made-thing, costly in its materials yet inelegant in its motley pieces.

The *Confessio's* idol is a kind of anthropomorphized Babel, designed to show man's idolatry and God's just iconoclasm. As John Fyler puts it in his discussion of Chaucer and alchemy, "Multiplicacioun," whether of metals or of words, exemplifies the fragmentation and confusion of human experience."¹⁹⁷ Fyler's words are especially relevant to this discussion because they underscore that multiplication is the issue here, not solely the statues as such. Idols composed of hodge-podge pieces bear their desperate falsity on the outside for all to see. Not every statue is an idol with the potential for evil, and using such images does not invariably receive Gower's condemnation. In Camille's *Gothic Idol*, "statua" is a word that resonated with implications of idolatry, but at the risk of oversimplifying what is a large topic, Gower's statues are often not problematized as they are in Camille's study. For example, in the *Confessio's* retelling of Pygmalion, there is no sense of an undue idolatry of woman, or a statue of one. Genius tells it rather like a love story with a novelty twist, without any morals or even any commentary (though, in Ovid, Pygmalion comes across as a pervert). Gower's Venus rewards Pygmalion with carnal bliss for his prayers, and Genius rewards him with praise for persevering in his love. The tale is a companion piece to the Iphis tale, in which divine intervention transforms

¹⁹⁷ Fyler, *Chaucer and Ovid*, 200.

the problematic female into a form conducive to heterosexual love. Gods are enablers, and images play into a male fantasy of getting a woman made-to-order. Images also indulge Gower's fascination for the constructed body. If the *Vox's* rebels exemplify an evil form of body-constructing piece by piece, Pygmalion's sculpture shows a case where the Dr. Frankenstein approach works.

If any statue would present Gower with a point of comparison with Nebuchadnezzar's statue, it would be Grosseteste and the head of brass in Book 4.234-43, in which the famed scientist uses a bodiless head for divination. The disembodied, metallic head is reminiscent of the decapitated head in the *Vox*. It is the kind of thing science fiction horror stories are made of, yet Gower is rather complacent about consulting a brass head for information on the future. Describing Grosseteste as a "grete clerc" and "besy . . . Upon clergie an hed of bras / To forge," Gower makes no pun on the clerical efforts to manufacture a machine of prophesy (234-7). Instead of worrying about the theological implications of this endeavor, Genius' moral is one of finishing what one starts: Grosseteste was admirably working hard to divine the future, but at the end of seven years' hard toil he becomes inattentive merely for "half a minut of an houre" and thereby ruins his efforts through so-called *Lachesse* (240-1). Genius' questionable point seems to be that the man, in constructing his machine, was not enough a machine himself.

Thus I think it is not statues themselves that are key here at what make them worthy or monstrous. It is the pieces of them that interest Gower. Pieces can be refitted, transformed, put together anew. However, the multiple combinations yield a most singular result: destruction from God's iconoclastic stone. World building and human ingenuity crumble under God's shattering scorn. It is a pessimistic narrative, yet Nebuchadnezzar's story provides its own alternative colophon within the illustrations and the text itself. This fascination with pieces is, as I have already

mentioned, central to how the statue is illustrated in Gower's manuscripts. However, those illustrations fall into two different modes of representation. As Richard Emmerson notes in his study of the manuscripts, third-recension manuscripts and revised first-recension manuscripts almost always show the statue in the context of its Biblical drama: the dreaming king lies in his bed, and we behold, with him, the subject of his dream—the statue itself—to the right and often in the foreground.¹⁹⁸ This image, moreover, is taken out of its textual context and placed as a frontispiece before the Prologue. Emmerson writes that “these frontispiece-like miniatures do not so much illustrate the poem as introduce and highlight its major concerns—with the macrocosm and microcosm, history and ethics, the world grown old and its effects on the individual lover.”¹⁹⁹

This presentation differs greatly from first-recension manuscripts, which contain smaller images embedded within the relevant portion of the text on the dream; more importantly, they show the statue alone, without the king (see, for example, the image from New York, Colombia Library, Plimpton 265, fol. 1v). Emmerson postulates that the illustrations do not include the king because they are smaller in size.²⁰⁰ This is surely a contributing factor, but the isolated form in illustration and text is not common in medieval art and deserves further attention. In other fourteenth-century texts, it seems the norm to use the statue to tell a story in word and image. Illustrations of Guillaume de Deguileville's *Pelerinage de l'âme*, for example, show a drama in which the statue stands besides the Knight Liberality, while onlookers are invited to compare.²⁰¹ The scene in Bodlein Library MS. Douce 305 is so dramatic

¹⁹⁸ Richard K. Emmerson, “Reading Gower in a Manuscript Culture: Latin and English in Illustrated Manuscripts of the *Confessio Amantis*,” *SAC* 21 (1999), 167-8.

¹⁹⁹ Emmerson, “Reading Gower in a Manuscript Culture,” 170.

²⁰⁰ Emmerson, “Reading Gower in a Manuscript Culture,” 169.

²⁰¹ See Camille, *Gothic Idol*, figure 148 (New York Public Library, Spencer MS. 19, fol. 95r) and 153 (Oxford, Bodlein Library MS. Douce 305, 57v).

that the statue looks alive: with his arms are crossed, he stands naked eyeing the Knight Liberality in such a way that he seems to be sizing up his armed, mounted opponent; his frowning face appears nonplussed. All of Gower's illustrations shy from such colorful expression and snapshots of drama, but the first-recension manuscripts are particularly opaque in terms of what story they are meant to tell. One important result is that, in Gower, the body *is* the drama. Gower first conveys this notion in the *Vox*, in which the headless statue conveys a dramatic moment, but the isolated body is adapted (decapitated) to reflect Gower's interpretation of an internecine body of which the feet dislodge the head. The isolated statue in the *Confessio*'s first-recension manuscripts render the ailment internal and structural.

The only isolated statue that resembles first-recension illustrations is from Machaut's *Remede de Fortune*, which like Plimpton, heads a section on Nebuchadnezzar's statue, and depicts a "horrible" face (an important qualifier considering the face is golden). Machaut then appropriates this image as part of a non-biblical drama of fickle Fortuna, who leads on her victims with her golden head but overturns their hopes.²⁰² There, the statue seems alive; as it takes a step, its curly hair bounces with the motion. In contrast, the static image in the *Confessio*'s first-recension illustrations underscore the horror of the body, head to toe; the narrative is relegated to the text, because body tells its own story. What a reader gains in place of a narrative is a invitation to consider the mixed elements of the image and to perceive it as a twisted version of the zodiac man, its body similarly divided but in ways that are destructive and meaningless. These pictures informed a reader—who may have been familiar with the nostalgic image from the *Vox*—that this image is freakish and

²⁰² Machaut, *Remede de Fortune*, edited and translated by James I. Wimsatt and William W. Kibler (Athens: University of Georgia Press: 1988), line 1004, page 223. The illustration can be seen in Camille, *Gothic Idol*, figure 152 (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale, MS. Fr. 1584, *Remede de Fortune*), page 288.

mismatched. Indeed, Emerson believes that third-recension manuscripts were designed to aid public readings, while first-recension manuscripts seem designed for private study from a Latinate audience. If this is correct, the image of the solitary statue allows the studious reader both to revise notions of *Vox*'s representation and to consider not just the Biblical narrative but the motley pieces that make up the statue's body. Its isolation, its standing posture with arms at the side, and its motley parts are reminiscent of an anatomical man, but the statue represents a disjointed world, not one harmoniously connected to itself and the cosmos. As book design changed to accommodate more public readings, the illustrations were no longer centered on the statue, though it remained prominent and often in the foreground. Nebuchadnezzar's inclusion reminds the reader of human creative and destructive powers. Though a frontispiece for the Prologue, the pairing of dreamer and dream remains an emblem for the *Confessio*, in which dreamers must give up destructive dreams. The colophon, a later addition that completes Gower's framing of the text in Latin authority, furthers the notion that the dream is rooted in Nebuchadnezzar's reign: he dreamed it, and he must react to it. The shift, then, focuses on humanity's reaction to the challenges it faces.

The text reinforces this shift in illustration styles. In Book 1, Nebuchadnezzar's pride is punished with metamorphosis. For seven years he wanders about as an unkempt wild man, but at the end of his penance, he regains his mind and is once more at one with himself, humbled and renewed. It is an opportunity never given to the statue, for an inhuman thing of technology cannot be forgiven. Nebuchadnezzar's grazing is far more human in its sympathetic humility than the humanoid statue that Gower insists resembles no beast but man—a statement that says less about the statue's humanity than humanity's bestial nature. “[I]lke ymage bar liknesse / Of man and of non other best” Gower affirms, to signify that man is a

flawed microcosm: “al this wo is cause of man” (908-9, 905). The statue is in man’s shape, not to honor man but to shame him and show humanity’s depraved, internecine ambition. Nebuchadnezzar’s morally edifying wheel of fortune, from man to beast and man again, revises the harshness of the statue’s narrative, showing the man’s redemption if not the machine’s. The tale’s episodes that mark Nebuchadnezzar’s metamorphoses—boasting, braying, praising—degrade and then uplift him, and the series of varied experiences speak to his composite personality and past. He will never be made out of “o matiere” like God’s stone from the “hully stage” or resemble Gower’s idea of the perfect body, but his metamorphosis exemplifies how multiplicity can lead to singular truth.

Bodily Babel: Gods, Gower, and Man’s Humors

Gower’s loathing for Nebuchadnezzar’s statue comes across in his need to pulverize it and deny its existence even as a ruin (as he permits in the *Vox*). Gower is willing to redeem Nebuchadnezzar the man, but obliterates the statue as an idol. Gower’s distaste for idolatry and mismatched parts returns in the discourse of world religions in Book 5. In this scathing exposé section, which shows Genius at his most judgmental, he seems to disregard all the sympathetic stories he has been telling Amans and seems to gloat over the presumably deserved misfortunes of the Greek gods and heroes. Hercules proves his moral degeneracy through his death by fire, a statement that willfully ignores the tragic tale of Hercules and Deianira, which Genius recounts in Book 2. Proserpina, in turn, is blamed for her rape by Pluto. Her mother tries to make an “honeste” girl of her and have her “kepte” indoors, but Proserpina willfully takes to the meadows to pick flowers; for this, her beautiful body is espied and snatched by Pluto, and she is lost to the upper regions (5.1282-4). Such a rant as

this reminds us that the *Confessio* is a collection of texts and voices, and that we have no reason to believe that Genius is showing any increased maturity as part of his *Buildungsroman*; if anything, the account shows that he speaks to the moment. I heard in a lecture once that the Romans in classical Spain were more Roman than the Romans, thus making up in culture what they lacked in location; so here, Venus' priest Genius is trying to be more Christian than the Christians, misunderstanding the point of Scriptures' redemptive lessons that weave Eastern wise men, Roman centurions, and Greek pagans into its inclusive story.

Throughout the passage, Genius condemns the Greeks for their lack of reason in building a religion through euhemerism, that is, they believed men like Saturn and Jupiter to be gods rather than the (violent and lecherous) kings that they actually were. This misguided worship creates a topsy-turvy world inverting the order of things. In the case of Pan, who is presented with more respect than lecherous Jupiter, gluttonous Bacchus, or cannibalistic Saturn, Genius still criticizes men who worshipped Pan as a nature god and so inverted the order of things:

And thus the nyce reverence
Of foles, whan that he was ded,
The fot hath torned to the hed,
And clepen him god of nature,
For so thei maden his figure. (5.1038-42)

The foot and head inversion recalls the bodily confusion from *Vox 7* and the *Confessio*'s Prologue. This bodily language is exaggerated when Genius recounts Dindimus' criticism of the Greek religion, on account that the Greeks prayed to a different god for each of their body parts. The description reads like a composite zodiac man gone bad:

...for every membre hadden
A sondri god, to whom thei spradden
Here armes and of help besoghten.
Minerve for the hed thei soghten,

For sche was wys, and of a man
 The wit and reson which he can
 Is in the celles of the brayn,
 Wherof thei made hire souverain.
 Mercurie, which was in his dawes
 A gret spekere of false lawes,
 On him the kepinge of the tunge
 Thei leide, whan thei spieke or sunge.
 For Bachus was a glotoun eke,
 Him for the throte thei beseke,
 That he it wolde waisschen ofte
 With swote drinkes and with softe.
 The god of schuldres and of armes
 Was Hercules; for he in armes
 The myhtieste was to fihte,
 To him tho limes thei behihte.
 The god whom that thei clepen Mart
 The brest to kepe hath for his part,
 Forth with the herte, in his ymage
 That he adresce the corage.
 And of the galle the goddesse,
 For sche was full of hastifesse
 Of wraththe and liht to grieve also,
 Thei made and seide it was Juno.
 Cupide, which the brond afyre
 Bar in his hond, he was the sire
 Of the stomak, which builleth evere,
 Wherof the lustes ben the levere.
 To the goddesse Cereres,
 Which of the corn gaf hire encess
 Upon the feith that tho was take,
 The wombes cure was betake;
 And Venus thurgh the lecherie,
 For which that thei hire deifie,
 Sche kept al down the remenant
 To thilke office appourtenant. (5.1457-1496)

Genius describes the pantheon in terms of the main physical parts the gods represent: Minerva for her head, Mercury for his tongue, and so on. In this biological description, Minerva does not just inspire men's minds; she is sovereign of "the celles of the brayn" (1463). The scientific tone suits the description of a type of zodiac man that links the body to the Greek gods rather than astrological signs. Medieval medical

texts abound in illustrations that target specific systems affecting the body: in addition to the zodiac man are the muscle-man, the wound-man, and disease-man.²⁰³ Genius' Greek anatomical man, however, is less a comment on the body and medical practise than a criticism of the gods. The passage abounds with matter-of-fact criticisms and backhanded complements, such as Mercury being a "gret spekere of fals lawes" (1466).

The list reductively sums up the pantheon and suggestively remakes it into one grotesque idol made up of pieces of gods and body parts. The description mocks image-making, beginning respectably enough with Minerva's head but then moving to parts more difficult to represent (e.g., the tongue, normally not represented in sculpture) or impossible to represent (i.e., Juno's gall-bladder), or parts modesty bids leave alone. As a description of a composite body, the passage links with the alchemical list of gods and metals as well as the Nebuchadnezzar passage. Like Nebuchadnezzar's statue, this anatomical man draws attention to the freakish nature of the fragmented image, viewed part by part; and in both, the image is disfigured and disabled. Nebuchadnezzar's statue stands on legs so weak that they are bound to fail: "The fieble meynd was with the stronge, / So myhte it wel nocht stonde longe" (Prol. 615-6). Similarly, the pantheon man is top-heavy in terms of the multiple gods supporting the head, neck, shoulders, chest, and belly, while the the body's legs and feet are not mentioned. They are perhaps supported by Venus as part of the "remanent" she oversees (though her main attention lies higher up), or perhaps the body has no legs at all. It is as though Gower presents the Greeks as builders of their own Nebuchadnezzar-type monster, with similar failures in structural design. The only difference is that they build with a smorgasbord of flesh instead of metals.

²⁰³ See, for example, figures 2, 10, 11, 14, 29, and 51 in Peter Murray Jones, *Medieval Medical Miniatures* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1985).

It is worth comparing this pantheon man to the alchemical list of bodies offered in Book 4:

The bodies whiche I speke of here
Of the planetes ben begonne.
The gold is titled to the sonne,
The mone of selver hath his part,
And iren that stant upon Mart,
The led after Satorne groweth,
And Jupiter the bras bestoweth,
The coper set is to Venus,
And to his part Mercurius
Hath the quikselver, as it falleth ... (4.2466-75)

Genius' list is both like and unlike the pantheon man of Book 5. It too contains the names of gods cherry-picked for an anthology, but the gathering here is given scholastic, not superstitious, weight. Alchemy enlists the properties of planets, not actually the gods, and these bodies are essential ingredients for alchemical recipes. They amount to something, provide the materials for a process, in a way that the pantheon's parts do not.

Both Nebuchadnezzar's statue and the anatomical man offer humanity its mirror image. It is an effective vehicle of social critique in a way that a tower of Babel or a Trojan horse is not, because it lets the viewer see himself through this critical lens. Empire is not a glorious conquest but just one society constructing a pair of legs or a couple toes. The body, seen from this vantage point in time, or out of time, shows its fissures, and empires are seen for the piecemeal interruptions that they really are, as kings come and go without any awareness of how they build on one another in this trivializing fashion. The anatomical man shows how humans think to map out ideal gods for all their body parts, thus trivializing medicine but more importantly religion, as though health and well-being were controlled by human ingenuity in praying to the right god for the right ailment.

However, these composite bodies reveal a fundamental anxiety of Gower's for

the human body itself. In his Prologue, the composition of man's physical body reflects physical and spiritual confusion. With an odd fixation on the ingredients that make up man, Gower hypothesizes that the perfect man would be all of one element but man's division into humors, or complexions, make him anatomically flawed:

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 evermor in such debat,
Til that o part be overcome,
Ther may no final pes be nome.
Bot otherwise, if a man were
Mad al togedre of o matiere
Withouten interrupcioun,
Ther scholde no corrupcioun
Engendre upon that unité.
Bot for ther is diversité
Withinne himself, he may noght laste,
That he ne deieth ate laste. (Prol. 974-990)

The humors, like the metals, make man at war with himself, keeping him “evermor in such debat.” It is a war—perhaps not the same bloodbath as the empire building of Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, but it is a system where “Ther may no final pes be nome” and where death is the consequence. Man's self-conflicting, divided nature is something to shame him. The chaotic list, “Of cold, of hot, of moist, of drye,” stand in opposition to the rhyme word, “dye,” the only possible outcome for this internecine profusion of matter and self-governance. The wishful thinking of a perfect man's composition “Mad al togedre of o matiere” is impossible; Gower seems to wish we possessed one substance, like God's stone. Lacking “o matiere,” man's multiplicity means that his only form of oneness is the “o part” by which he is overcome. That “part” is undefined; it could be one of the raging humors or the “debat” itself, but in either case, it stands for the feet in Nebuchadnezzar's statue, the weakest part of the

body and the site for God's vengeance. In a body of ceaseless confusion and multiplicity, that "o part" becomes singular and apart only at the moment of destruction. The *rime riche* couplet at the end repeats the word *laste*, contrasting the unity and sameness in the rhyme at odds with man being described whose division is wearing himself out body and soul.

Gower's diagnosis of human physiological disorder explains his refusal to fit man's body in the scheme of the zodiac man: as a divided body, man cannot take that harmonious, central role in creation. As Genius implies in Book 5, to see one's body corresponding to the influence of various gods is to confess one's irrational idolatry. Gower only adheres to the zodiac man as a model of connection between human and celestial bodies insofar as to assert that the microcosm disrupts the macrocosm. In the Prologue, Gower notes that creation suffers from man's division and connects the fall of man with the corruption of the natural world:

Whan that he fell, thei fellen eke,
Whan he wax sek, thei woxen seke;
For as the man hath passioun
Of seknesse, in comparisoun
So soffren othre creatures.
Lo, ferst the hevenly figures,
The sonne and mone eclipsen bothe.
And ben with mannes senne wrothe;
The purest eir for senne alofte
Hath ben and is corrupt ful ofte,
Right now the hyhe wyndes blowe,
And anon after thei ben lowe,
Now cloudy and now clier it is.
So may it proeven wel be this,
A mannes senne is for to hate,
Which makth the welkne to debate. (Prol. 913-28)

Gower blames "mannes senne" on the corruption of nature; even the sun, moon, and "purest eir" are marred by human corruption. What is problematic about this reasoning is the link between corruption and the human body. Celestial bodies may

influence humanity, but ultimately man's body influences all creation.

Man's sin is linked to his divided body, a topic he treats here and in more scientific detail in Book 7. There, he maps out the four elements—earth, water, air, and fire—and explains that similarly the body of man contains four humors—melancholy, phlegm, blood, colic. These humors are each respectively located in four parts of the body—spleen, lungs, liver, and gall-bladder. The anatomy lesson resembles the zodiac man: the body is divided into loci of influence, adversely connecting man's humors with the elements of the larger world.

Such a portrait of the human body indicates, Gower argues, that man's division is sinful in itself and a source for the contention in nature, yet elsewhere Gower notes that man's body is God's creation:

The creatour hath set and leid
The kinde and the complexion
Of alle mennes nacion.
Foure elementz sondri ther be,
Lich unto whiche of that degré
Among the men ther ben also
Complexions foure and no mo . . .
He which natureth every kinde,
The myhti God, so as I finde,
Of man, which is his creature,
Hath so devided the nature,
That non til other wel acordeth (7.382-8; 393-7)

God “set” the complexions in man with the same precision as he set the stars in the constellation. The “Complexions foure and no mo” specifically match the four elements. Man's division is a purposeful act of God. Gower indirectly questions God's handiwork in such passages, but this unease with the human body is part of his larger concern with the efficacy of discernment through division. In Book 7, Gower demonstrates the wealth of Aristotelian knowledge to be gained by understanding the universe by breaking it down and examining its parts—both physical parts, like the elements, and abstract components, like the quadrivium. Dividing his book into

sections on the physical sciences, rhetoric, and politics allows Gower to use division as an incisive tool, but when it comes to man's body, this system of knowledge fails, and Gower questions the efficacy of knowing a thing by its parts. Divided into discernable parts, the cosmos reveals the concord of its minutiae, but the human body, broken down, is a broken body of pieces "That non til other wel acordeth."

The discussion of the four humors neatly falls into a discussion of the four elements and the division of the world by its four postdiluvian men, Noah, Japheth, Ham, and Shem. Both the Prologue (l. 1015) and Book 7 (l. 537ff.) address the division of man's body and the solidarity of Noah's family—significant in light of man's fragmented condition, especially symbolized in Nebuchadnezzar's statue. The "felaschipe" safely at "shipe" (a pun Gower underscores with rhyme) extends the hope of salvation, much as God at the helm will do (Prol. 1015, 1088). Man is divided, but Noah's sons survive to divide the world in a way that seems both orderly and intimately connected with the inner mechanisms of the universe, with the four elements, four complexions, and four servants of the heart complementing the four regions of the world: Europe, Africa, Asia, and the vault of heaven overhead. In this factual account, the story of the three men is not tainted with the discussion of Ham's shame and Noah's curse; the division of the three sons is described without commentary as though the division is a geological, not psychological or moral, process.

The orderly categorizing and listing in Book 7 is delivered in a tidy, lecturing format which makes man's role in the cosmos seem secure and structured. This lecturing tone, however, falters during Book 7's discussion of man's body. Gower seems to underscore the biased nature of Genius' discussion by having him categorize the humors almost exclusively by their role in sexual performance. Ultimately this outlook reduces the function of the body into an anatomical *Roman de la Rose*, in

which the heart is Love and the spleen, lungs, blood, and gall-bladder are “Servantz” of Love; their “will and myht” are either “sufficant” or inadequate (7.467, 406 and 425, 417). The love of good governance and the love inspired by Arion’s harmony are ignored in this discussion of erotic desire. Whereas the Prologue shows man’s divisions politically, Book 7 portrays man as bent solely on an erotic mission. This anatomical portrait may be Gower’s way of showing that an analysis of the body, part by part, reveals an incomplete portrait of man, only concerned with the flesh.

To partition a man out by his physical parts is not to know him better. Furthermore, the soul inside remains both unified and completely resistant to being understood through division:

Bot God, which hath the soule diere,
Hath formed it in other wise.
That can no man pleinli devise;
Bot as the clerkes ous enforme,
That lich to God it hath a forme,
Thurgh which figure and which liknesse
The soule hath many an hyh noblesse
Appropred to his oghne kinde. (7.492-9)

The soul is irreducible; it cannot be broken down nor can “man pleinli devise” its composition, because to know the soul’s form is to know God’s form. God, then, divides man’s body, but in investing him with a soul, God makes man in His own image with “hyh noblesse” beyond anything in creation. Unlike alchemy, there are no books or past knowledge that penetrates this mystery, but that opacity is the point. It is form beyond anything Gower has treated.

The only analogous form is the fifth element, ether. Like his treatment of the human body and its soul, so the four elements are treated as a cluster, after which Gower introduces this more complex form:

. . . yit ther is an element
Above the foure, and is the fifte,
Set of the hihe Goddes gifte,

The which that orbis cleped is.
 And therupon he [Aristotle] telleth this,
 That as the schelle hol and sound
 Encloseth al aboute round
 What thing withinne an ey belongeth,
 Riht so this orbis underfongeth
 These elementz alle everychon,
 Which I have spoke of on and on. (7.610-20)

As with all of God's creation, ether is "set" in place by God's craftsmanship. Gower calls ether "orbis," and there is a hint of ether's orb-like shape in the egg simile. The four less perfect elements are "Encloseth al aboute" in a shell of ether. Ether, then, caps creation; it molds its shape into a rounded form, "hol and sound." The four elements are safely nested, and the simile expresses not the fallen quality of the four elements but rather their immaturity and inchoate freshness. An egg is a thing of promise, and ether's role sets the boundaries for creation, giving it shape, health, and the possibility of growth and change. Ether takes on a maternal role; it is a thing "Above," a superior placement resembling Gower's subsequent praise of Astronomy that "Fleth above alle that men finde" (631). There too, the avian metaphor demonstrates superior elements rising over lesser ones. The eagle and egg contain what is below them; they do not sever ties with lesser materials but breathe value into them by their supernal form. Gower solidifies this connection between ether and astronomy when he mentions ether in the context of his astronomical treatise:

That orbis, which I spak of err,
 Is that which we fro th'erthe a ferr
 Beholde, and firmament it calle,
 In which the sterres stonden alle (7.687-90)

Ether is star-studded, containing within its folds "Planetes sefne" and the zodiac inscribed with the circles of each sign. As shell and firmament, the outer boundary of creation is also what organizes everything within it, the "gifte" that gives (7.612).

As with Gower's other gustatory images, like chaff and wheat or dish and cup, the egg among other things signifies food, and a very special food, as Louise M.

Bishop notes:

John Trevisa's translation of Bartholomew the Englishman's *On the Properties of Things* recommends eggs be cooked between hard and soft because then they provide balanced humoral nourishment: "Eyren . . . mene bytwene neisse and hard bep mene in here worchyng and passious" (Eggs [cooked] between soft and hard are balanced in their sustenance and power) (Bartholomaeus Anglicus and Trevisa 1975, 2:1345, lines 29-30, my [Bishop's] translation into modern English). We seldom think of eggs as passionate, but we do think of them as nourishment. That nourishment, in a Galenic framework, is material and spiritual at once. The ideal nature of such a cooked egg's nourishment reflects cosmic qualities in its humoral consistency: it is balanced between hot and cold, dry and moist. It provides the body material for its work, wherein the coction, or cooking, of the stomach allows access to the egg's virtues. The egg's passion moves through the body, animated by its force, its "passion." It likewise affects the body's passions because their balance is inflected by individual character: sanguine, melancholic, phlegmatic, choleric. And all—eggs, passions, characters, work—are material, substantial, "mattered."²⁰⁴

Ether and eggs are both containers of extremes. The process of cooking converts food into a balanced substance, and Bartholomaeus' careful consideration of the egg's perfect state reminds us that when in Book 4 Gower praises illustrious founders of learning and science, including Cham, Cadmus, and Saturn, Gower is not being sarcastic when he includes "Verconius of cokerie / [who] Ferst made the delicacie. (2433-4). Even cooking is a scientific process, involving the cosmos and the cookery of the human stomach. The human body is a machine alive to these processes of conversion and balance.

However, in some ways man's body is the opposite of nature's body. If ether is the egg shell containing the four elements, man's flesh is the shell to his soul. It is the opposite arrangement, putting the soul at the mercy of the body for its gestation. By extension, man is the shell to all creation, and that is why the natural world exists in topsy-turvy unrest:

²⁰⁴ Louise M. Bishop, *Words, Stones, and Herbs: The Healing Word in Early Modern England* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007), 37-38. See also Bartholomaeus Anglicus and John Trevisa. *On the Properties of Things: John Trevisa's Translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus "De proprietatibus rerum": A Critical Text*. 3 vols. Ed. M. C. Seymour. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

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
Agein the man and make him werre.
Therwhile himself stant out of herre,
The remenant wol nocht acorde.
And in this wise, as I recorde,
The man is cause of alle wo,
Why this world is divided so. (Prol. 955-66)

The see now ebbeth, now it floweth,
The lond now welketh, now it groweth,
Now be the trees with leves grene,
Now thei be bare and nothing sene,
Now be the lusti somer floures
Now be the stormy wynter shoures,
Now be the daies, now the nyhtes,
So stant ther nothing al upryhtes.
Now it is lyht, now it is derk,
And thus stant al the worldes werk
After the disposicioun
Of man and his condicioun (Prol. 933-44)

All change is perceived as corruption; for the present, all the wonder of alchemy is gone. Gower, then, has trouble with the zodiac man, because that image connects man's body to the cosmos in such a way to point to celestial influences on man, yet man is a creature that breaks all boundaries and somehow augments his body, vying with the firmament and influencing creation to reflect his own disordered state. However, in the second passage, which actually precedes the one on man's "litel world" which causes the greater one to "mistorneth," anaphora and tone take natural processes, such as tides and seasonal changes and even the natural flow of day into night, and portray them as chaotic effects of man's sin. It is a hypochondriac's paranoid view of nature and sin, seeing signs of illness where there are none. Gower is falling into the danger of bodily metaphors, seeing fragmentation in the aftermath of discussing the Statue of Precious Metals. Obsessed by the Monster of Time, Gower

perceives all time—even a sunset—as infected with the same fissures and disjointed points of contact.

The political implications of this scenario fuel Gower's fears and resurface in Book 7, in which Gower retells the story of Rehoboam from I Kings 12. Though begged by the common people for a merciful rule, Rehoboam takes the counsel of young advisors, who advise him to say that his little finger will bear as much force as Solomon's entire body:

Bot seie unto the poeple plat
That whil thou livest in thi lond,
The leste finger of thin hond
It schal be strengere overall
Than was thi fadres bodi al. (7.4084-8)

The passage reveals Gower's interests as a reader who zeroes in on the contrast between men as a contrast in their parts. In the Vulgate, it is a contrast between Rehoboam's finger and his father's back: (Vulgate: *loqueris ad eos minimus digitus meus grossior est dorso patris mei*; Douay-Rheims: "My little finger is thicker than the back of my father.") Gower did not invent the contrast between a son's pinky and his father's whole body, but the tale's inclusion accords with Gower's other tales of bodies with mixed up parts. Gower's rendition lacks the sexually explicit contrast between finger and "loins" (KJV), but the sexual connotation seems less important to him than the passage's hypertrophic flavor. The son's finger, competing against the father's body, swells into a body of its own. Rehoboam's name means "may the people be enlarged," but his actions show concern with his own enlargement.

The story—from the Bible and Gower—is remarkable on many levels, not least in the scathing criticism of Solomon by the wise old knights whose advice Rehoboam rejects. The knights record that Solomon "streite ladde" his people, and his building project, which might seem a pious deed, is only a cover for his greedy empire building:

Whan he the temple made newe,
Thing which men nevere afore knewe
He broghte up thanne of his taillage,
And al was under the visage
Of werkes whiche he made tho. (7.4043-7)

Like the Tower of Babel, Solomon's temple is not a symbol of piety but of human pride; it exalts not God but the king and serves to enslave his people "under the visage" or under the appearance of good works, but another visage, his own face, enslaves men as the king looks on to exact every penny. Solomon is criticized in terms post-1381 England would understand: umbrage at "taillage" and arbitrary control, both of which Rehoboam embraces and magnifies. Like Richard, Rehoboam is asking for it. His finger is his temple, separated from himself yet representing himself, a part standing for a whole much like the body parts of sanctified saints in reliquaries, though in Rehoboam's case, perverted. His finger's touch brings on not a new era of empire as he anticipates, but fractures the realm like shards of clay. Pointing and commanding, Rehoboam's finger puts his body at odds with his people's, yet its gesture is insecure, in that Rehoboam sees himself in competition with his father and determines to be perceived as a king of his father's stature. Rehoboam's Frankensteinian swollen pride and pompous finger foreshadow Israel's division, for only two tribes will remain loyal to him. With ten tribes gone, the foolish king is left with little more than that impotent little finger.

Not all kings were so self-absorbed. Gower uses King Codrus to postulate a solution to Nebuchadnezzar's statue and the issues it raises of idolatry and bad governance. Codrus is faced with a decision between saving his life and saving his people. His preference to die for his people is phrased in terms that mark his kingdom as a composite body of which he is both the head yet he prizes the other members:

Wher is nou such another hed,
Which wolde for the lemes dye? (7.3200-1)

Codrus' willingness to die is as shocking as a body with a head willing to die for its limbs. The metaphor is absurd: a body can suffer the loss of a limb, but the loss of a head is death. It also seems to conflict with Gower's own sense of hierarchy within the social body:

. . . For alle resoun wolde this,
That unto him which the heved is
The membres buxom scholde bowe (151-3)

This was the viewpoint, too, of John of Salisbury and other political theorists. Such an anthropomorphosized body politic was illustrated in the *Avis au Roy* of 1340 as a nude man whose parts are labeled like a zodiac man: the prince is the crowned head, the knight the hands, the merchants the legs, and the laborers the feet.²⁰⁵ Codrus's decision seems to disregard this whole system. However, what Gower experiments with is another look at Nebuchadnezzar's statue in which the golden head, by sacrificing itself, enriches the whole body. In *Vox* 7 the headless statue reflects the unruly members who decapitate their leader and cut themselves off from a golden age; in the Prologue, Gower reassesses the head-feet dichotomy and problematizes the entire body, whose parts all spell the fragmentation of the human condition. Here, in Book 7, Gower inverts the head-feet dichotomy altogether, allowing the head to die freely for the limbs. Instead of a smashing stone that threatens to devastate the body, King Codrus gives himself as freely as Christ. His willingness to allow his head to be replaceable shows his humility; the body will live on without him. Christ's paradox from Luke 9:24 applies to Codrus' willingness to make this sacrifice: "whosoever will save his life shall lose it; for he that shall lose his life for my sake, shall save it."

This sacrifice—this governance through the heart—is Gower's proposition for harmony in the social body. Of all the parts that can stand for the whole, this is the one. Gower notes in Book 7's lesson on human anatomy that "as a king in his empire

²⁰⁵ Camille, *Gothic Idol*, 284.

/. . . So is the herte principal, /. . . for the governance” (485-9). The heart is what Nebuchadnezzar’s statue is missing, and in the pantheon-anatomical man, it is ruled by intemperate Mars. Genius uses this simile here only superficially, for he describes the servants of the heart as organs that aid or hinder the body in achieving the “will and myht” of lovemaking. Codrus’ example makes the simile reality, for he is both the king and heart of his kingdom. As Codrus knew, the body was going to be damaged whatever he decided to do; by taking the damage on himself, he saves his people. That willingness to let the golden head fall remakes the statue, no longer a Ozymandias-like ruin like *Vox 7* testifying to past glory lost and no longer an idol or symbol of royal hubris like the *Confessio*, but a symbol of sacrifice and love for one’s people. It is a more noble, because voluntary and permanent, version of Nebuchadnezzar’s seven years as a wild man. By being removed from the paradigm of the Monster of Time, Nebuchadnezzar leaves behind the concerns of empire; his punishment is part of his intervention. Similarly Codrus thinks not of himself and his irreplaceable purity as a golden head, but thinks with his heart.

Chapter Five

Writing the Literary Zodiac: The House of Fame and Gower's Heavens

'b o d y' by James Merrill

Look closely at the letters. Can you see,
entering (stage right), then floating full,
then heading off – so soon –
how like a little kohl-rimmed moon
o plots her course from *b* to *d*
as *y*, unanswered, knocks at the stage door?
Looked at too long, words fail,
phase out. Ask, now that *body* shines
no longer, by what light you learn these lines and what the *b* and *d* stood for.

In the introduction I positioned Merrill's poem "b o d y" as a lodestone for reading Gower. To both poets, words contain their own mysteries—other words within and apart from themselves, to illuminate, if not to answer questions about our own formation. This is clearly what Gower experiments with in his insistence of using *rime riche*, which paradoxically can be considered an ornate French import, or as a simple (because repetitive) form of rhyme in line with a plain poet's literary repertoire. Both views ignore the verbal power Gower is unlocking—that friction of plain words against their twins, yielding other words and other questions; or in cases of *rime riche* variants, in which a word is nested within its rhyme word, drawing attention to syllables and the syllabic anchor of the larger word, often at odds with its own prefix and rhyme partner. Like Merrill's b o d y, Gower speaks through words and the pieces of words, which signify in different directions, incorporating what was not there before.

As a poem about the moon, Merrill's "b o d y" resonates with Gower's poetry in other way. In writing about natural philosophy—astronomy—Merrill in his modern sense toys with a tradition of cosmic sympathy, in which the lunar body is connected

to ours. The letters *b o d y* describe a lunar life cycle first, until Merrill applies the pressure of metaphor to make us recognize our similitude with that heavenly process of beginning and dying. As Laura Quinney points out, “The *o* is the ‘I’, as its likening to ‘a little kohl-rimmed moon’ (a mascara-lined eye) punningly suggests”.²⁰⁶ It is a poem completely true to lunar observation, but even more completely true about our subjectivity. The poem describes ourselves more than the moon. But the poem is also about the words—even the letters—we cling to to articulate what is becoming and what is past, and all that remains when the physical body in view is “phased out” and we sit in darkness before the poem’s final words:

. . . Ask, now that *body* shines
no longer, by what light you learn these lines and what the *b* and *d* stood for.

Words and their tiniest components are the answer to Merrill’s concluding riddle. They are the light by which we not just read, but *see*. A young moon looking like a lower-case *b* and a dying moon looking like a lower case *d*: this vision not only pieces apart words as bodies, but views other bodies—celestial or personal—as having the same lexical components. It is a poet’s vision to see a graphic pun and draw that pun into poetics and a shared sense of lexical process.

This is Gower’s poetics, too, and articulated in similar ways. His Book 7 of the *Confessio Amantis* contains his own treatise on astronomy and astrology, and while my chapter will take up some existing issues in criticism—namely the branding of Book 7 as a weak scientist’s (and weak author’s) attempt to add authority to his text without understanding parroted words—my argument is that Gower writes about the heavens with a view toward his own poetics, with that same sense of cosmology’s graphic likeness to poetry. *Kosmos* means harmony in Greek, and the heavens were a model for terrestrial order. Yet Gower does something with the zodiac that has never

²⁰⁶ Laura Quinney, “Kohl-Rimmed,” *London Review of Books*, 4 April 2002. Accessed online at http://www.lrb.co.uk/v24/n07/quin01_.html, June 22, 2009.

been adequately explained: he focuses on shared stars between constellations. Not at all hermetically sealed off from one another Aries' tail and Taurus' horns share stars. Such a joining, I would argue, is a graphic vision of constellations "rhyming" with one another. It is celestial *rime riche*.

Essential Digressions: Book 7 and the Frame Narrative

A grasp of Merrill's poem and Gower's *rime riche* equip us to set forth for a literary journey of scientific writing in Book 7 of the *Confessio Amantis*. Past critics have regarded this section as irrelevant to the love narrative plot (Genius himself prefaces the material with a "destrauht" anxiety of covering material "noght to the matiere / Of love, why we sitten hier / To schryve, so as Venus bad" (7.6-9). More recently, its very separateness underscored by Genius marks it as a new vein of material that becomes of central importance to Gower's larger project, as indicated by Gower's own colophon, concluding his English text with a Latin summation of its contents:

Tercius iste liber qui ob reuerenciam strenuissimi domini sui domini Henrici de Lancastria, tunc Derbeie Comititis, Anglico sermone conficitur, secundum Danielis prophetiam super huius mundi regnorum mutacione a tempore regis Nabugodonosor vsque nunc tempora distinguit. Tractat eciam secundum Aristotilem super hiis quibus rex Alexander tam in sui regimen quam aliter eius disciplina edoctus fuit. Principalis tamen huius operis materia super amorem et infatuatas amantum passiones fundamentum habet. Nomenque sibi appropriatum Confessio Amantis specialiter sortitus est.

This third book, which is fashioned in the English language on account of reverence to the most vigorous lord, his lord Henry of Lancaster, then Count of Derby, distinguished historical times according to the prophecy of Daniel concerning the transformation of the kingdoms of this world from the time of King Nebuchadnezzar up until now. It also discourses following Aristotle about those things in which King Alexander was tutored, as much in his governance as in other matters of his instruction. But the principle subject of this work has its basis in love and the infatuated passions of lovers. And the

proper name for it was especially chosen to be the *Confessio Amantis*. [trans. Galloway]

Having already discussed Nebuchadnezzar, I will focus only on the portion that pertains to Book 7. From this colophon it is at least apparent that the education of Alexander was not a digression; it is additional material (“*Tractat etiam*”) but with purpose, especially if the “*Principalis*” theme of love is one designed to be outgrown at the poem’s end. Another reason to include Aristotle’s and Alexander’s names in the Latin paragraph are their high visibility. The education of Alexander was a genre, and Gower’s choice to add that genre lends authority to the work he is so diligently positioning in his Latin colophon.

Still, though, why place the material in Book 7, just before the riddle of Antiochus and the self-knowledge of an aged Amans of Book 8? It could be a narrative decision, to equip Amans with an education and a sense of self-regulation that he will need once he leaves Venus’ service, the last lecture before graduation, if this is a *Bildungsroman*. Alternatively, it seems the stories in general and Book 7 in particular are an investment in Amans by giving him the whole set of liberal arts, not calibrated to peel the onion of *eros*—not to hone his soul but to add to it a lifetime in stories. Listening brings self-reflection, and others have commented on the confessional mode as a vehicle of moral change. But listening also brings the desire for more listening. Amans asks for the education of Alexander; the glitch in narrative structure is his own doing. The knowledge he receives, like the hundreds of pages of tales that come before, shape him into his true self—not a lover of one local girl, but a lover of many girls in many myths and legends, a traveler through tale telling, a councilor of kings, a poet of the quadrivium, a Sherazade in story spinning, and a lover of poetry.

As R. F. Yeager says, it is a poem that outgrows its theme of erotic love.²⁰⁷ It does this by giving us the time to hear the stories, time actually to ignore a *bilgunsroman*, as the stories saturate and work their influences behind the scenes, until the time comes when Gower pulls the rug out from Amans. Time, which we had so much of in the preceding books, suddenly becomes scarce and to the moment late in Book 8. One can only speculate what Gower was constructing with his massive collection of tales and a narrative that hinges on the surprise of Amans' age, the surprise of time having past. It is a surprise to us, too, because we read the book not thinking about the passage of time as we are loosely cued to do in other story collections like the *Decameron* or *Canterbury Tales*, in which stories are told as days go by, with a final point of time or destination. The only end to Amans' frame story has been an erotic one, which Gower denies in favor of chronological pressure unfelt previously: Amans is getting to the end of his erotic life, and of the narrative and life itself. It's quite a trick Gower plays on us—who saw this coming? But it is also a trick Genius and Venus play on Amans, whiling away the days (years?) in tale telling until the time comes to face the mirror. It trumps the confessional mode as something never sincerely meant, at least, not in the way Amans was expecting—unless he really was a younger man at the start, and Genius/Gower purposely kept him engaged in narrative until he could shed Eros like a snakeskin.

This insincerity on Genius and Venus' (and Gower's) part is balanced by Gower's unsettling sincerity when he glossed the introduction of Amans with a distancing comment: *Hic quasi in persona aliorum, quos amor alligat, fingens se auctor esse Amantem, varias eorum passiones variis huius libri distincionibus per singula scribere proponit*. [Here the author, fashioning himself to be the Lover as if in the role of those others whom love binds, proposes to write about their various

²⁰⁷ Yeager, *John Gower's Poetics*, 265.

passions one by one in the various sections of this book.] (n. 59ff). Amans is a figment of Gower's imagination—a funny, crafty, earnest one, but one whom Gower has other plans for that have nothing to do with erotic love. Gower is dramatizing a semi-Chaucerian narrator, unsuccessful in love but not so much a cynic, for Chaucer's narrator writes about love seemingly because he cannot have it for himself. It is a point of bitterness in the poet's persona, lacking in Amans, who proves eager to talk, eager to listen, ever hopeful his lady will come around. She does not, but something else happens to Amans, something unique to Gower's text: Amans becomes Gower, no longer a lover of a lady but a lover of England and books. One gets the impression that Amans, sent forth by Venus and exiting stage left, is the John Gower who returns and writes the whole *Confessio Amantis*, revisiting the stories that did more than while away the time from his beloved lady: they made him the writer he really was all along. For what man would stand listening to Genius all this time, asking for more stories, wondering about Alexander and the liberal arts, if he were really headlong in love as he has claimed? Thus there is character development, or at least development in the expression of Amans' character, but no one linchpin tale that makes Amans become John Gower. It is done by the long process of successive tales, by which a humanist is born. Book 7, the lengthy discourse on speculative and practical sciences, is a digression to the love plot but central to the Gower within Amans.

Not only is the digression essential; so, too, are the sciences. In some sense they provide intellectual ornamentation, positioned to lend authority to Genius and his pupil (and of course Gower, whose Latin glosses reflect a penchant for authoritative book making). Bringing in the Education of Alexander adds further heft to Gower's project with its inclusion, but Gower is not only interested in the moral weight of education but the incorporation of science into his poetic vision. Scientific learning and poetic ambition intersect; poetry discusses science but science is rendered into

poetry. The graphic envisioning of letters and words metaphorically embodied in Merrill's moon resembles ways Gower renders the cosmos as poetry. He moves into his astronomical treatise with a tone that may seem like a preamble or digression but actually shows his cautious preparation in addressing this material. Discussing the divisions of philosophy one by one, he purposely holds off on discussing astronomy. "Bot ferst," he sidesteps, and gives a quick-run down of everything else astronomy touches upon: the Hyle which makes up the stars and everything else, the elements, complexions, and human anatomy (7.196). The pieces are not just building blocks of information, but interconnected. The systematic approach ushers in poetry through science; physical science and astronomy pave Gower's flight path.

Poets on the Wing: The Eagle's Flight in Horace, Chaucer, and Gower

Despite criticism that draws attention to Gower's literary art, the tag "moral Gower" still influences readers to read Gower as a moral poet, not a literary one. One reason Chaucer gets all the attention are the clear-cut markers of literary ambition, especially in his earlier, classical poems. His *Troilus* kisses the steps of Virgil, Ovid, Homer, Lucan, and Statius; his narrator invokes classical gods and takes us on temple tours and even a Dantesque eagle ride to the *House of Fame* replete with monuments to the classical past. Gower does not write this way—no step-kissing, no eagle rides to wicker-basket worlds—so his poetic ambition and investment in a literary inheritance require a finer-tooth comb. *Cento* provides a case in point: though Gower's *Vox Clamantis* is dense with *cento* lines from Latin authors, clearly establishing an intimate knowledge of Latin poets, casual readers have trouble identifying these esoteric borrowings, let alone interpreting them. There is nothing like the obvious Virgilian lines in the *House of Fame*: "I wol now synge, yif I kan, /

The armes and also the man.” Though the destination is uncertain, Chaucer’s lantern is easier to follow, so he seems closer to the classical tradition, while Gower’s esoteric *cento*, drawing from Ovid’s *Ex Ponto* and other lesser known texts, was once dubbed schoolboy plagiarism.²⁰⁸

Analogous is the contrast between Chaucer’s and Gower’s scientific writing. Clyde Walter Curry and J. D. North have testified to Chaucer’s advanced scientific learning, particularly his astronomy.²⁰⁹ In contrast, George Fox wrote a tepid assessment of Gower’s “extremely limited” scientific knowledge.²¹⁰ Much as Macaulay lamented Gower’s Latin plagiarism, Fox criticized Gower for parroting words he could not understand. James Simpson’s *Sciences and the Self* and Ann Astell’s *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning* have started to reassess this evaluation of Gower’s sciences, but Simpson focuses on political science, and Astell uses Gower as a contemporary to set off Chaucer’s erudite scientific and poetic contribution.²¹¹ At one point, Astell writes that the lower classes have no part in Gower’s astronomy; Gower and Chaucer “associate this particular division of knowledge especially with the nobility, whose privileged status and tenuous good fortune dispose them to make anxious inquiries into the celestial motions that turn Fortune’s ‘false wheel’ [I.925].” (95-96).²¹²

To explore these issues of poetic ambition, scientific writing, and social issues, I wish to look at Chaucer’s and Gower’s eagles. In the endnotes to his edition, Russell Peck comments that Gower’s brief reference to the eagle in Book 7 invites a

²⁰⁸ G. C. Macaulay, *Complete Works of John Gower* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1899-1902), IV.xxxii. See Siân Echard, “Gower in Print,” *A Companion to Gower* (London: Boydell & Brewer, 2005), 132.

²⁰⁹ Clyde Walter Curry, *Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1960); J. D. North, *Chaucer’s Universe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988).

²¹⁰ George Fox, *Mediaeval Sciences in the Works of John Gower*, 94.

²¹¹ Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, Ann Astell, *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

²¹² Astell, *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning*, 95-96.

comparison of Chaucer's Eagle in *The House of Fame*; in fact, Gower responds to Chaucer's quibbles over stellification and the theme of flight as also found in Horace, Brunetto Latini, and Dante. In making this argument and speculating on the astral connections of Arion, I conclude that Gower's scientific writing is not only up to snuff scientifically and poetically, but surprisingly invested with a broader social vision than *House of Fame* affords. Flight to the stars and poetic power is not enjoyed solely by Gower's elect; with Arion's help, all can enjoy social harmony and some of the quadrivium, too.

Flight heavenwards needs no explanation: we intuitively grasp that this is a lofty literary theme, put eloquently by Piero Boitani: "The flight of birds, mysterious and lofty, was such a beautiful metaphor for poetry—an object for divination and interpretation, the point at which heaven and earth, inspiration and words met."²¹³ In the classical era Horace compares the swan to Pindar, who mastered the metaphor of flight, and his imitators to Icarus.²¹⁴ Horace refers to eagles in his poetry only twice, but poetic flight infuses his poetry even beyond the examples in Boitani's study. His Ode 1.1 is an exploration of various occupations and preoccupations: the athlete, the farmer, the hunter, and so on, until he arrives at the poet as the supreme, airborne role:

Me doctarum hederæ præmia frontium
dis miscent superis; me gelidum nemus
Nympharumque leves cum Satyris chori
secernunt populo, si neque tibias
Euterpe cohibet nec Polyhymnia
Lesboum refugit tendere barbiton;
quodsi me lyricis vatibus inseres,
sublimi feriam sidera vertice.²¹⁵

As for me, it is ivy, the reward of learned brows,
that puts me among the gods above. As for me,
the cold grove and the light-footed choruses of Nymphs

²¹³ Piero Boitani, *Winged Words* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 109.

²¹⁴ Ode 4.2 is discussed in Boitani, *Winged Words*, 112.

²¹⁵ Horace, *The Odes*, ed. Kenneth Quinn (London: Bristol, 1996), 1.1.29-36

and Satyrs set me apart from the people
if Euterpe lets me play her pipes, and Polyhymnia
does not withhold the lyre of Lesbos.
But if you enroll me among the lyric bards
my soaring head will touch the stars.²¹⁶

On the one hand, Horace claims a lofty ambition to rank among the foremost lyric poets and to separate himself from other men. The other occupations, worthwhile endeavors and pleasures, such as a farmer's satisfaction at a full silo or a businessman's retreat from work with a cup of Massic wine, contextualize the poetic project the way a landscape unrolls before a bird's eye view. But for all of Horace's claims to ascend to the heavens through verse, his flight over other careers is earth-drawn (one thinks of that loving portrait of Massic wine). It is a mix of ambition and perspective that suits a poet who in Ode 4.2 compares Pindar to a swan and himself to a bee. Moreover, the literalized image in the final two lines of Ode 1.1, half lofty, half silly, resembles the jest about the proud man whose head gets so big it hits the door frame (the translation "touch the stars" softens the force of "feriam"), or in the case of Horace's hypertrophic head, hits the stars. Though Horace wants poetic glory, he notes that quasi-stellification has its humor.

We see a similar sense of humor when Geoffrey rides the eagle and fears getting too close to the stars. The eagle initially seems as glorious as Dante's eagle and Martianus Capella's gold winged, personified Astronomy, but Geoffrey has reservations about flight:

"O God," thoughte I, "that madest kynde,
Shal I noon other weyes dye?
Wher Joves wol me stellyfye,
Or what thing may this sygnifye?
I neyther am Ennok, ne Elye,
Ne Romulus, ne Ganymede,
That was ybore up, as men rede,
To hevене with daun Jupiter,

²¹⁶ Horace, *The Complete Odes and Epodes*, transl. David West (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

And mad the goddys botiller.” (584-92)

This passage is a wonderfully funny twist on Horace’s ambition to be one with the gods on high: instead of Horace’s businessman enjoying Massic wine, Geoffrey may end up serving wine to the gods. Astell discusses Chaucer as part of a new, rising class of educated citizens who stand apart from the nobility, and Chaucer’s narrator seems to fulfill that role here in such a way as to parody nobility’s astral connection: it is not false modesty that makes him wish to be spared the company of stellified Biblical and classical heroes but self-preservation. In this critique of literary tradition, the stellified are sterile, lifeless forms.

Geoffrey, as a love poet, shows what may be an appropriately contrasting relationship to Astronomy and its aquiline spokeswoman. Martianus Capella’s *De Nuptiis Mercuriae* sets the expected tone when his personified Astronomy presents herself equipped with golden wings and offers a lengthy discourse on her knowledge of celestial bodies. However, the tricky thing about flight heavenwards, or writing about it, is that it can backfire, or at least the offer to ascend falls on uninterested ears like pearls before swine. Even Martianus knows this, for Astronomy’s discourse and Book 8 of *De nuptiis Philologiae et Mercurii*, or *The Marriage of Mercury and Philology*, ends abruptly, and Book 9 begins with Venus’ irritation that Astronomy’s erudition delays the wedding: “Will there be no end?” she asks irritably.²¹⁷ Geoffrey’s comic replies are such that dodge the Eagle’s serious lesson in his pursuit of more earthly interests including the House of Fame which essentially mirrors the earthly pursuits of the elite.

Gower rewrites Chaucer’s image of flight to make the stars again desirable, but only to portray an even greater inversion in class structure. In Book 1 of the *Vox Clamantis*, written maybe a year or two after the *House*, it is not the poet-narrator that

²¹⁷ Martianus Cappella, *The marriage of Philology and Mercury*, transl. William Harris Stahl and Richard Johnson, with E. L. Burge (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), Book 9 [888], 345.

touches the heavens but rather one of the common rebels of 1381. In Gower's rendition of the Rebellion, the human rebels had been changed into domestic beasts, and they in turn metamorphose into rebellious, even monstrous animals, such as donkeys with lion's tails and cows with bear paws and dragon tails. Additionally, sometimes the monstrosity involves peasants not changing their shapes but rather enjoying the benefits of their superiors, such as eating fine foods or sleeping in lordly beds. In one passage, a gander, having also stolen the falcon's beak and talons, wants to touch the stars with his wings ("*ex alis sidera tacta cupit*" [I.522]). It is sinful presumption for a bird that treads dung to fly so high. Moreover, according to bestiary lore, its flight is as impossibility as a donkey having a lion's tail. According to Brunetto Latini, the four elements are "mingled in created things."²¹⁸ The stars are completely made of fire, but terrestrial objects are a mix, and birds can fly because they are made with fire and hence are lighter and quicker and borne through the air. He qualifies this statement to account for variety in avian species:

But there is a difference, for just as birds surpass all other creatures in lightness and quickness because of the extremities above, which are abundant in them, one bird surpasses the others because the light and quick extremity is more abundant in him, and for this reason this one flies higher than the others, and this is the eagle. Those in which there is a greater middle quantity do not fly so high (I refer to the crane), and those in which the lower extremity is abundant are slower and heavier (I refer to the goose and the gander).²¹⁹

Presumably this composition of astral ingredients allows the eagle to stare at the Sun, while other birds and animals cannot, but it is interesting that the goose is specifically contrasted to the eagle and found lacking. In his *De Vulgari Eloquentia* Dante adapts Brunetto Latini's distinction between eagles and geese and applies it to writers and would-be writers (like Horace's Pindar eagle and Icarus imitators); echoing the Sibyl's language of the *Aeneid* Book 6 as he invokes the labor of writing as the labor of

²¹⁸ Brunetto Latini, *The Book of the Treasure (Li Livres dou Tresor)*, translated by Spurgeon Baldwin and Paul Barrette (New York: Garland, 1993), 61.

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 62.

ascending from the underworld, he underscores the challenges of writing with practice rather than impulse:

Sed cautionem atque discretionem hanc accipere, sicut decet, hic opus et labor est, quoniam nunquam sine strenuitate ingenii et artis assiduitate scientiarumque habitu fieri potest. Et hii sunt quos Poeta Eneidorum sexto Dei dilectos et ab ardente virtute sublimatos ad ethera deorumque filios vocat, quanquam figurate loquatur. Et ideo confutetur illorum stultitia qui, arte scientiaque immunes, de solo ingenio confidentes, ad summa summe candenda prorumpunt; et a tanta presumptuositate desistant; et si anseres natura vel desidia sunt, nolint astripetam aquilam imitari.²²⁰

But learning the necessary caution and discernment is ‘the difficult part, requiring much effort’, since these can never be achieved without exertion of the intellect, dedicated study of technique, and immersion in knowledge. And those who succeed are those whom the author of the *Aeneid*, in the sixth book, calls God’s beloved, raised to the heavens by their ardent virtue and made the children of God—though he is speaking figuratively. And this should suffice to refute the foolish claims of those who, devoid of technique and knowledge, relying on ingenuity alone, lay hands on the noblest topics, those that should be sung in the highest style. Let them lay such presumption aside; and, if nature or their own incompetence has made them geese, let them not try to emulate the star-seeking eagle.²²¹

If not from Dante’s text, somewhere Gower must have found this distinction between poetic eagles and bombastic geese, because that is precisely what Gower is evoking when his rebel gander explodes boundaries by rising to the skies of poetic eagles and displacing the favorites of God. Star-seeking involves the literal seeking out of the heavens and the metaphoric heights of poetry. The Sixth Book of the *Aeneid* is not only the account of the underworld but the vision of Rome’s future glory, lifted to greatness through its own labor and virtue. Framed by these standards, the gander’s poetic presumption is an offense to God and Rome—an offense with application to the Rebellion of 1381, which attacks London, or New Troy, named after the city from which Rome inherits its civilizing forces.

²²⁰ Dante, *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, ed. and transl. Steven Botterill (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 58, Book 2.4.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

Yet there is also this to say: Gower's rebels are not the lazy beasts of Dante's text. They know something of difficulty and labor—"hic opus et labor est"—Dantean words that ring with the Sibyl's warning to Aeneas that the return to the upper regions would be a challenge: "hoc opus, hic labor est" (6.129).²²² It is presumption for any man to take up this gauntlet of epic poetry, but Gower's rebels force their way into this exclusive realm. Once they put their minds to it, the rebels take over sleeping London, and Gower's geese, in that sense, do touch the stars with their wings. Geese and the other classical, mocking rival to the eagle, the jackdaw, become not objects of satire but lords of the skies.²²³ Furthermore, the gander transforms into a *milvus* or kite, which Gower knew from the *Fasti* as either a star or constellation (*Fasti* 3.793-4). Thus in their own way, the rebels achieve a kind of aquiline power and Horatian ascent. However much Gower resents the violent success and excess of the lower classes, by phrasing the rebel's accomplishment in poetic terms, Gower concedes a space to rival, nontraditional poets. I do not mean to say he thinks they are good poets and have earned the title of star-seeking eagles, but that he uses such metaphors at all grafts his poetic perspective onto them and shows a more inclusive poetic perspective than Dante and Chaucer show in similar scenes. Gower at least lets rebel poets crash the elite party not just in 1381 London but also in *Inferno* 4 and *House of Fame* 3.

Cherry-picked by Jove for service as a love poet, Geoffrey gains an exclusive ride upward to see his predecessors enshrined. The pedestals bearing Virgil, Ovid, Statius, Claudian, and others are grand, yet the hall of fame is as stagnant as the underground, more a scene from the sixth book of the *Aeneid* than the ninth canto of the *Purgatorio*. Perhaps part of that stagnant atmosphere stems from the narrow

²²² Virgil, *Aeneid I-VI*, ed. R. Deryck Williams (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1996).

²²³ Likewise, the jackdaw is mocked beside the eagle, both in classical poetry and in Gower's *Vox I*, to be discussed in my chapter, "Decapitation in a Word." For the discussion of Pindar, see Boitani's chapter, "Eagles."

bandwidth of the narrator's interests, his focus on literary tradition alone. Earlier in Book 2, he refused to take up the Eagle's offer to learn some astronomy. Just as Chaucer's narrator feared his own stellification, so he rejects having anything to do with all celestial bodies beyond the safe distance of a reader's armchair. The eagle tries to appeal to his literary interests. Wouldn't he like to see the celestial bodies he's been reading about? But Geoffrey will have none of it, requiting the eagle's rhymes with cheeky refusals:

"Wilt thou lere of sterres aught?"
 "Nay, certeynly," quod y, "right naught."
 "And why?" "For y am now to old."
 "Elles I wolde have told,"
 Quod he, "the sterres names, lo,
 And al the hevenes sygnes therto,
 And which they ben." "No fors," quod y.
 "Yis, pardee," quod he; "wostow why?
 For when thou redest poetrie, [says the eagle]
 How goddes gonne stellifye
 Bridd, fissh, best, or him or here,
 As the Raven or eyther Bere,
 Or Arionis harpe fyn,
 Castor, Pollux, or Delphyn,
 Or Athalantes doughtres sevene,
 How all these arn set in heavene;
 For though thou have hem ofte on honde,
 Yet nostow not where that they stonde."
 "No fors," quod y, "hyt is no nede.
 I leve as wel, so God me spede,
 Hem that write of this matere,
 As though I knew her places here;
 And eke they shynen [thy seluen] here so bryghte,
 Hyt shulde shenden al my syghte
 To loke on hem." (2.993-1017)

Though Chaucer's astronomical learning is probably the most advanced of any medieval literary author, Chaucer's narrator does not want to see the stars, but only the poets who allude to them. The Eagle offers Geoffrey a celestial Hall of Fame populated by stellified people, beasts, and objects, which Geoffrey rejects, yet the

comparison points out that that the authors who recounted these classical stories themselves are as effectively stellified on pedestals if not in the stars. Geoffrey prefers his constellations unmoving on the page, and he uses literary authority to justify not seeing the stars, since in the *Somnium Scipionis*, Africanus deems the stars too bright for mortal eyes.²²⁴ Only an Eagle could look on them since the Eagle, as known in bestiary lore, is the only creature who can stare at the Sun.

John Scattergood made a clever point about the manuscript variation of line 1015 to read “thy seluen” instead of “they shynen.” “It is likely,” he writes, “that Chaucer is here referring to another constellation—that of Aquila, the eagle’s own constellation, where it could see itself in its own celestial form. . . . Chaucer is not only making the point to the Eagle that he knows something about astronomy, but that he knows also that the species of eagle is itself part of the stellification of ‘briddes, fische, best’ (1003) to which the formation of celestial geography testifies”²²⁵ Perhaps, though, Chaucer’s narrator does not know too much about astronomy if he is trying to draw the Eagle’s attention to Aquila, which is a summer constellation not to be found in the December skies at the time of the dream. To be sure, the Eagle also refers to summer constellations, which indicates either that he is speaking abstractly or perhaps distractedly as he tries desperately to pique Chaucer’s interest in *any* constellation of the four seasons. Whether we read “seluen” or “shynen” and accept or reject Scattergood’s argument, the underlying point is that Chaucer’s narrator is making a bookish argument rather than an empirical one, and that he justifies subordinating astronomy to literature without even looking up.

²²⁴ See also *Anticlaudianus* 6.3-14 and Trevisa’s Bartholomaeus Anglicus, *On the Properties of Things*, 1.458.

²²⁵ John Scattergood, “Chaucer’s Joke Against the Egle: *The House of Fame*, 1011-1017,” *Notes and Queries*: September 2004; v. 51, 3; 234.

Not so with Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, whose Genius informs Amans about fortune while asserting the stellar scaffolding of chance: "Among the mennes nacion / Al is thurgh constellacion" (7.641-2). Genius does not need a literary reason to care about the constellations; rather, astronomy gives authority to literature. By giving it a separate section with its own Latin header, Gower in turn gives textual importance to astronomy, the fourth mathematical science after *arsmetric*, music, and geometry. Moreover, he introduces this fourth science with prerequisite materials organized in four foursomes: the fourfold creation of the world, the four elements, the four complexions, and the four servants of the heart. The number four, a significant number since Galen, ordered the "bodily tetrad" that organized the world to ancient and medieval observers; it operates on the principle of harmony through balance of wet and dry, hot and cold, yoking extremities through gradations of elements and humors.²²⁶ On a cosmic level, the four-fold structure establishes a fundamental connection between Astronomy, creation, and the composition of man and the world and all our affairs, a connection captured and poeticized in that anagram rhyme above nesting *nacion* within *constellacion*.

Gower also says as much with the symbol of the eagle:

The science of Astronomie
 I thinke for to specefie,
 Withoute which, to telle plein,
 Alle othre science is in vein
 Toward the scole of erthli thinges.
 For as an egle with his winges
 Fleth above alle that men finde,
 So doth this science in his kinde. (625-32)

In this rewriting of *The House of Fame*, Gower's Eagle is a star-seeking bird more like Dante's glorious creature than Chaucer's chatty one, and Genius honors astronomy above earthly pursuits. Poetry is in vain without the authentication of scientific truth,

²²⁶ Louise Bishop, *Words, Stones, and Herbs*, 33; Linda Ehrcan Voigts, "Bodies," in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. by Peter Brown (London: Wiley-Blackwell, 2002), 40.

and the eagle enables a man to become a *vates* with knowledge beyond terrestrial realms. The eagle is not only his means of transportation but of connection between worlds which otherwise seem disjointed from a human perspective or understood only abstractly (like the four foursomes). The brief passage indicates how Gower orders his poetic vision and his text around the very material that Chaucer's narrator rejects.

On that note of shared subject matter, we may notice Arion's name in the speech of Chaucer's eagle—he mentions “Arionis harpe fyn” among the constellations and proposes to tell “How all these arn set in hevене.” It is intriguing to think of Gower reading Chaucer's poem and deciding to invest more importance into the constellations and Arion's character than that afforded by Chaucer's star-averse narrator. Usually Lyra signifies Orpheus' lyre. But in calling the constellation “Arionis harpe,” Chaucer's Eagle draws attention to Arion, whose lyre is stellified along with the Dolphin that saves him from death at sea. However, just as the narrator dismisses the Eagle's constellations, so he suppresses the myth and music of Arion's lyre. When Geoffrey includes Arion in Book 3's list of great musicians (with his name sadly spelled with an O, like the hunter Orion), Geoffrey chooses to have Arion silently seated beside Orpheus, the master artist:

Ther herde I pleyen on an harpe,
That sowned bothe wel and sharpe,
Orpheus ful craftily,
And on his side, faste by,
Sat the harper Orion,
And Eacides Chiron,
And other harpers many oon... (3.1201-7)

Arion is lost in Orpheus' shadow as well as the sound of the lyre and various string and wind instruments in the Hall of Fame—”Moo than sterres ben in hevene / Of which I nyl as now not ryme, / For ese of yow and los of tyme” (1254-6). “Arionis harpe” is not only taken from Arion and given to Orpheus, but the stars themselves are lost in a “seës” (literally ‘seats,’ but also suggestive of seas) “of gleees” (1209-10;

1251-2). Interestingly, with the loss of Arion, astronomy, and the Eagle's wisdom, Geoffrey's poetic flight falters as he excuses himself for not writing. Just as he does not bother with stars, so too with musical instruments, and poetry suffers from the lack of interest in all that the Eagle and Arion represent.

In readdressing the importance of the constellations and astronomy, Gower brings back the importance of Arion. To be sure, there is no mention of Arion's Harp in the section on Astronomy, since Lyra is not in the zodiac and thus not included in the list of constellations (though Lyra's main star, Vega, is obliquely referred to as one of the 15 Behenian fixed stars invested with great astrological influence; Vega is recorded by Agrippa as the star in the Vulture).²²⁷ Possibly Gower knew that Lyra has also been known as *aquila cadens*, depicted as an eagle holding the lyre, another example of the eagle symboling poetic ambition.²²⁸ Gower in essence gives back to the Eagle both the lyre and the Arion myth that Chaucer's Eagle was promoting.

Arion, of course, is immortalized by Gower for his uncanny gift of bringing peace among natural enemies. When he plays the harp, predator and prey stand still and forget to run:

Bot wolde God that now were on
An other such as Arion,
Which hadde an harpe of such temprure,
And therto of so good mesure
He song, that he the bestes wilde
Made of his note tame and milde,
The hinde in pes with the leoun,
The wolf in pes with the moltoun,
The hare in pees stod with the hound;
And every man upon this ground
Which Arion that time herde,
Als wel the lord as the schepherde,
He broghte hem alle in good acord;
So that the comun with the lord,

²²⁷ Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*, transl. James Freake, ed. and annotated by Donald Tyson (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1993/2000), 395-6.

²²⁸ Richard Hinckley Allen, *Star Names: Their Lore and Meaning* (New York: Dover, 1963), 283.

And lord with the comun also,
He sette in love bothe tuo
And putte away malencolie.
That was a lusti melodie . . . (Prol. 1053-70)

The passage celebrates a kind of metamorphosis, even stellification in the way the animals are described: “The hinde in pes with the leoun, / The wolf in pes with the moltoun, / The hare in pees stod with the hound.” The linked order presents a terrestrial zodiac modeled after the celestial one, Aries linked to Taurus linked to Gemini and so on. The order Gower sees in the heavens is bestowed upon the Earth.

What is also interesting about the Arion passage is the nonverbal nature of Arion’s music. By lauding Arion instead of a great poet like Virgil, we have no text, and no morally ambiguous rhetoric. Gower’s description of Arion’s *temprure*, *mesure*, and *note* idealize a nonverbal performance not in qualitative terms such as the sweetness of the sound but rather the mathematical perfection in good measure; the praise is more technical than aesthetic. One can compare Gower’s focus on measured sound to a more conventional description of music in Geoffrey’s praise of Orpheus already quoted above:

Ther herde I pleyen on an harpe,
That sowned bothe wel and sharpe,
Orpheus ful craftely . . .

In Gower’s text, by contrast, we initially hear nothing about the music being played *sharpe* or soft, fast or slow. For roughly sixteen lines, we have no idea how Arion is playing except in this Platonic sense of perfect “temprure” and good measure. The science of song seems foremost to Gower’s assessment. Interestingly, the Arion passage differs from Gower’s own brief description of music as one of the mathematical sciences (7.163-74). Through Harmony, men craft music by use of voice and instruments and accordant notes,

The whiche men pronounce alofte,
Nou scharpe notes and nou softe,

Nou hihe notes and now lowe . . . (169-71)

The beauty lies in the range of notes, pushed by musicians to vary in speed and volume. We can imagine a virtuoso performance that pleases through skillful variation of sound. Gower's initial description of Arion's song, however, is impossible to "pronounce," for we have no idea what kinds of notes Arion uses. What Gower underscores is Arion's technical craftsmanship and his ability to harness it. Only later in the passage does Genius pause and reflect, "That was a lusti melodie / Whan every man with other low," but before he wanted us to get a sense of what the music sounded like and the boisterous reaction of the audience, he wanted to give us an abstract notion of its measured perfection, because that is the more important issue for him—and most important of all is the social embodiment of Arion's measure and harmony personified in "good accord," as seen in the peace between men of all stations and animals that are natural enemies. For Gower, that social embodiment *is* the music. While Arion's music draws all people together, in Chaucer's *House* the social element is frozen in statues of the elite—there is no true audience being changed by an artistic event. Gower's poetry is one that does not fret over his place in a poetic hall of fame, but instead he depicts that hall as a veritable concourse free for all. His *Astronomy* is a harmonious realm of constellations linked neatly as couplets: from this idealized realm of actual stars in the heavens, not Chaucer's shrine to the classics, Gower finds inspiration.

Poetics of Contraries: Algorithm's ABCs

Gower's technical focus on sound evokes Chaucer's Eagle's claim that "Sounys noght but eyr ybroken" (2.765). But Arion's measured sounds do not break air so much as arrange it into something more than it was. Genius portrays sound as

intimately linked with order, harmony, and song. In a striking metaphor in Book 7 he compares sound to Hyle:

Tofore the creacion
Of eny worldes stacion,
Of hevne, of erthe, or eke of helle,
So as these olde bokes telle,
As soun tofore the song is set
And yit thei ben togedre knet,
Riht so the hihe pourveance
Tho hadde under his ordinance
A gret substance, a gret matiere,
Of which he wolde in his manere
These othre thinges make and forme.
For yit withouten eny forme
Was that matiere universal,
Which hihte ylem in special.
Of ylem, as I am enformed,
These elements ben mad and formed,
Of ylem elementz thei hote,
After the Scol of Aristote,
Of which if more I schal reherce,
Foure elementz ther ben diverse (7.203-18)

Sound is a noun and adjective. Sound, one of the more shifting, volatile substances, contains that formless vitality of Hyle within it; that kinetic energy translates into a stabilizing force, the adjectival sound. After this passage Genius describes the four elements founded on Hyle, and the first is Earth, “Substantial, strong, sadd and sound” (226). Sound the adjective echoes sound the noun in the proceeding comparison between sound and Hyle. That metamorphic, liquid energy is not dissipated but translated into our most foundational element, Earth, the very ground we walk on. All is connected: sound to song, hyle to matter, four to four, crafting a poetics of contraries in which diverse elements are shared for the wealth of creation. Sounds, then, do not end in cacophony and so much as begin a new world symphony, to which it had been “knet” all along but never realized before without proper measure. Song is

made through a mix of all stations, not hijacked by the lower classes, as in the *Vox*, but thoroughly collaborative and intertwined.

If I have done my job in Chapter One, you cannot read this passage without noticing the *rime riche* on *forme*, and the *rime riche* variant on *formed* only one couplet over. Here is cosmic sympathy rendered in verse. After pondering the form of proto-matter and its form-producing ability, Genius himself is *enformed*; indeed, he is *enformed* of ylem insofar as he is formed by the elements “mad and formed” of ylem. The roundedness of the rhyme coincides with the rounded nature of creation. The *rime riche* on *forme* serves as a point of entry to Gower’s cosmology, a discussion which ranges from the stars above to our own internal organs in response to the heavenly motions above. It is a philosophical view of the cosmos rendered poetical with Gower’s framing of these concepts through rhyme.

In the Hyle passage, Gower “knet” the scientific with the poetic just as the technical nature of sound is united with the art of song. To put it another way, Gower knits numbers with letters. In his section on mathematics, Gower discusses the science of measurement:

Of Arsmetique the matiere
Is that of which a man may liere
What Algorisme in nombre amonteth,
What that the wise man acompteth
After the formel propreté
Of Algorismes abecé.
Be which multiplicacioun
Is mad and diminucioun
Of sommes be th’experience
Of this art and of this science. (7.153-62)

In this passage of Arabic terms put to English use, numeration unexpectedly gives away to letters as a mathematical mode. Macaulay posits an algebraic formula with the letters a, b, c, or “this is perhaps due to a misunderstanding by Gower of the word ‘abaque’ (or ‘abake’) in the *Trésor*. . . : ‘Et de ce sont li enseignement de l’abaque et

de l'augorisme.”²²⁹ Readers like Macaulay and Fox tend to fixate on whether Gower's science was right. Here it may be mistaken, but the way he writes about science only underscores that Gower is fashioning science in poetic terms. Whatever else he thought of the word *abecé*, he knew this word designated the letters of the alphabet. As Isidore of Seville notes in his *Etymologies*, the Greek alphabet served double-duty as letter and numerical symbols, opening the way for numerological games with people's names (thus $\alpha=1$, $\beta=2$, etc.).²³⁰ This would not have been Gower's only game with letters and numbers, for in his Latin poetry he made wordplay out of numbers.²³¹ Gower's English game with the *abecé* depends upon layers of meaning and a tightening sense of scale. Involving loan-words and mathematical terms in the initial lines, the vocabulary then abruptly narrows to its barest element: the abc's. Mathematical complexity is translated into the most basic elements of literacy. The remainder of the passage is more a literary approximation of mathematics, and if the passage before *abecé* was “science,” the latter portion is “art,” in that language carries the sense of mathematics not through terms like *Arsmetique* and *Algorisme*, but through its polysyllabic rhymes. There is something slightly

²²⁹ G. C. Macaulay, *The Complete Works of John Gower*, v. 3, 522, 155n.

²³⁰ See *Etymologies*, trans. Barney, I.iii.10, page 40.

²³¹ Gower plays abundantly with syllables and letters, but he also plays with numbers. One example is the puzzle that hides the date 1387 in the opening lines of Part I of the *Tripartite Chronicle* is nearly as elaborate as the name-game in the Prologue of his *Vox*:

Tolle caput mundi, C ter et sex lustra fer illi,
Et decies quinque cum septem post super adde:
Tempus tale nota, qui tunc fuit Anglia mota.

(Stockton's translation: “Take the first letter of *mundus* and add to it C three times repeated, and take six periods of five years; and afterwards add ten times five, plus seven: Note the time when England was in upheaval.”)

Letters MCCC become symbols for Roman numerals for the date 1300, and the number 87 is added up by simple arithmetic rather than letter-play. The game recalls Gower's syllabic play in the *Vox*, in which words have parts (for example, *mundus* has a *caput*) that can be taken apart, added to, and reassembled to solve the puzzle. A delightful if less elaborate contemporary analogue can be found in Richard Wilbur's *Disappearing Alphabet*:

M is a letter, but it alternates

As a *Roman numeral* often found in dates.

If M should vanish, we would lose, my dears,

MINCE PIES, MARSHMALLOWS, and a thousand years. (Wilbur, *Collected Poems*, 569.)

obfuscating about rhyming “multiplicacioun” with “diminucioun”—their definitions race in opposite directions even as shared sounds “knet” the words together.

Interestingly, numbers are like Hyle, being themselves undefined, amorphous, and capable of multiplication or division, but bestowing form to all else once they are arranged so that the wise man can “experience” them. Not only is language involved with numbers, but human experience, rendering the microcosm not just a tiny copy of the larger universe but an active player within the macrocosm.

By knitting numbers to letters, sound to song, elements to humors, macrocosm to microcosm, Gower writes of a universe rich with connections and identities nested within larger structures. It is a scientific and poetic outlook quite in contrary to Geoffrey of *The House of Fame*, who tries to divide sound from song and stars from verse, the result of which is a halt in poetry. Gower, by embracing and connecting all, finds poetry where Geoffrey would not. It is with this perspective that we are best prepared to read Gower’s encyclopedic poetics, which is not a mere display of learning but a synthesis of knowledge as an essential statement of humanity’s connection with the larger structures that locate us.

Earth is not only an element but humanity’s home, and that home is scored with points of contact between terrestrial and celestial realms: “Among the mennes nacion / Al is thurgh constellacion” (7.641-2). It is vital to keep in mind these connections when turning to the treatise on astronomy, which will be the focus of the remainder of this chapter. The *climata* section of Book 7, connecting regions of the Earth with the planets that influence those regions, has puzzled readers for its listing of data as dry as it seems incorrect. I wish to defend both Gower’s science and his poetry, which come together in a pairing of *nacion* and *constellacion*.

Climates are terrestrial zones that receive celestial influence, though there was wide disagreement as to what the regions are or which planets dominate which

climates. For example, the planet Mercury presides over the sixth terrestrial region, which Gower renders in this way:

Of the planetes the secoude
Above the mone hath take his bounde,
Mercurie, and his nature is this,
That under him who that bore is,
In boke he schal be studious
And in wrytinge curious,
And slouh and lustles to travaile
In thing which elles myhte availe:
He loveth ese, he loveth reste,
So is he noght the worthieste;
Bot yit with somdiel besenise
His herte is set upon richesse.
And as in this condicion,
Th'effect and disposicion
Of this planete and of his chance
Is most in Burgoigne and in France. (7.755-70)

In Peck's footnotes, he comments that Gower does not attribute numbered zones to the planets but rather specific locations and suggests possible reasons, "I have not found a source for the national connections that Gower affiliates with each planet. Galloway wonders whether the linking of Mercury with Burgundy and France might not be an acknowledgment of the literary skills of Froissart and Machaut."²³² Galloway's idea opens up possibilities for praise and satire in Gower's connections between planets and terrestrial regions; that said, the connection between the French and Mercury and various other *climata* is not new to Gower. In *Dante's Christian Astrology*, Richard Kay addresses the use of the climates and medieval astrologers, including Albumazar and Ibn Ezra, who indeed refer to places, not just latitudes and longitudes, of which precise degrees were contested and national boundaries a point of reference. Ibn Ezra specifically posits that nationality is vital information for making a prediction.²³³

²³² Peck, n. 7.755-70, p. 446.

²³³ Richard Kay, *Dante's Christian Astrology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1994); Shlomo Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra and the Rise of Medieval Hebrew Science* (Boston: Brill, 2003), 148.

Mercury, for example, most influences Provence, Marseilles, and Byzantium; though I am not sure where Byzantium fits into this scheme, Gower's attribution to Mercury's power over Burgundy and France seems to accord with this tradition.²³⁴ So too with Mars' power over Jerusalem according to Alcabitius and Bonatti; Gower's Holy Land accords with this claim.²³⁵ Ibn Ezra ascribes Saturn's climate as the first, ranging from China to the Red Sea and the Nile; Gower describes this zone as the Orient.²³⁶ There is no neat fit across the board of all the planets and climates, for astrologers did not agree over these contested regions.

Gower's climates are benign and reflect the harmonizing connection between earth and sky, man and God. Mars and Saturn bear malign influences, but their regions are far from England. Gower's English world—influenced by the Moon—has only to wrestle with a bit of wanderlust, and no doubt to share in more traditional lusts from Venerian climes and Mercurial ones from nearby France. Ancient seats of power like Greece and Egypt are influenced by the more august, benign planets, respectively the Sun and Jupiter. Thus Gower not only shows a vertical connection between earth and sky but a web of contacts between nations—lunar England plays the lesser light to the solar magnificence of the classical past. In sum, Gower's climates display more than an encyclopedic display of knowledge. They fan out the planets and regions of the world and show where these different worlds touch. The *climata* section, with its marriage of *nacion* and *constellacion*, falls just outside the discussion of the physical makeup of matter—the four-fold creation, four elements, four complexions, four servants of the heart—and serves as the transition between the micro and macro, discussing the far away planets whose influence is at our door. These interconnected points become key to Gower's poetics in describing the stars. Like Gower's interest in

²³⁴ Kay, *Dante's Christian Astrology*, 63.

²³⁵ Kay, *Dante's Christian Astrology*, 173.

²³⁶ Kay, *Dante's Christian Astrology*, 226.

the hinges by which couplets hang together, so in Gower's science his primary interest is in the points of connections, the contact between one world and the next.

Writing the Zodiac: *Celestial Rime Riche*

Like the marriage between numbers and letters, natural philosophy and poetry, flight and verse, sound and song, there is a similar knit relationship between astronomy and poetry. Astronomy is a science of "Figure, cercle, and moevement," but so too is poetry, which couches astrological influence in an anaphoric gyre:

The stat of realmes and of kinges
In time of pes, in time of werre,
It is conceived of the sterre (7.646-8)

The repetition is slight but recalls a similar technique in the Arion passage (e.g., "The hinde in pes with the leoun, / The wolf in pes with the moltoun," Prol. 1059-60) and elsewhere in the Prologue's concentration on flux to humanity's detriment (e.g., "The see now ebbeth, now it floweth," 933), and is used in Book 7's treatise on rhetoric. It is sententious speech. Genius may hasten to add that a godly man need only follow God and not worry about astrology, but Genius' own language, echoing Gower's Prologue, leans toward a theology inclusive of "law naturel."²³⁷

So too does *rime riche* underscore the roundedness to a poetic cosmology.

Genius concludes his introductory remarks on astronomy with a double rhyme:

Tak hiede, for I wol beginne,
So as the Philosophre tauhte,
To Alisandre and it betauhte,
Wherof that he was fulli tawht
Of wisdom, which was him betawht.

²³⁷ For the opposite argument positing Gower's fear of astrology, see Chauncey Wood, *Chaucer and the Country of the Stars* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 38-39.

It is a seemingly redundant rhyme, so circuitously at odds with the claim that Genius will “beginne” his promised instruction. The change in spelling is almost an admission on Gower’s or the scribe’s part that it is unusual to employ the exact same rhyme in two consecutive couplets, only differing the in use of the active voice in the first couplet, saying was Aristotle *did*, and the passive voice for what *was done* to Alexander. It suggests to me a few small points. First, “betawht” does not mean “instructed” so much as “entrusted.” This term is deeply resonant for Amans. James Simpson has already argued for the importance of the repeated word “enformed” to describe Amans’ growth. That growth has been through storytelling, and that storytelling is an investment on the part of Amans’ tutor, Genius. If Genius is Amans’ creative spirit, it is in a sense Amans authenticating the right to dwell on story for wisdom and spiritual growth.

The repeated *rime riche* variant also mirrors the close to and fro relationship between tutor and student. Such closeness can be dangerously charged, as in the case of Dante and Brunetto Latini as suggested in the *Inferno*. There, a kind of pederasty or incest is presumed in the teacher trying to make his disciple a mere copy of himself. This not the case for Gower’s Aristotle and Alexander, nor his Genius and Amans. Rather, the repetition establishes an inheritance of wisdom and tradition. If there is intellectual incest between teacher and pupil, it is only of a pure and ordained kind, as described in Book 8’s account of Abraham insistence on a cousin-wife for his son Isaac, an act of sanctioned incest that will fruitfully result in the twelve tribes of Israel and the birth of a nation:

And thus as Habraham hath tawht, [instructed]
 Whan Isaac was God betawht, [entrusted to God]
 His sone Jacob dede also, [did the same practice of incest]
 And of Laban the dowhtres tuo,
 Which was his em, he tok to wyve,
 And gat upon hem in his lyve,

Of hire ferst which hihte Lie,
 Sex sones of his progenie,
 And of Rachel tuo sones eke:
 The remenant was for to seke,
 That is to sein of foure mo,
 Wherof he gat on Bala tuo,
 And of Zelpha he hadde ek tweie.
 And these tuelve, as I thee seie,
 Thurgh providence of God Himselfe
 Ben seid the Patriarkes tuelve . . . (8.119-34)

The rhyme *tawht / betawt*, then, establishes the direct line of God's people from Abraham to the Patriarchs. Aristotle and Alexander are part of a similarly august, intellectual genealogy, one which still has its descendents, including Genius, and finally Amans. Like the *abecé*, the 'letters' in the initial rhyme give way to 'numbers,' producing the countless people of Israel promised to Abraham from the time of Sarah's barrenness. From barrenness to incest to a mighty nation—God's providence operates on faith, in which the word given by God seems at odds with the numbers confronting the faithful.

Gower not only points out the basic structure of twelve children who became the twelve Patriarchs, he categorizes and quantifies the numbers pertaining to each of Jacob's wives and concubines. The manipulative jealousy between the sisters and Jacob's favoritism shown toward Rachel's children are beside the point, and the four wives are listed according to their rank (the first two are Laban's daughters, the last two are the daughters' handmaidens). Otherwise they are listed chronologically: the elder and first wife Leah is listed first, then Rachel, then Rachel's handmaid Bilhah and Leah's handmaid Zilpah. If "remanent" seems a slighting term for Bilhah's and Zilpah's children, Leah's daughter Dina is omitted altogether. By not figuring into Genius' narrative of incest producing Israel's twelve tribes, she literally does not count.

This brief discussion indicates how a fixation on numbers determines what is said and what is omitted. Though the narrative contexts are so different in matters of sacred history and astronomy, the stylistic similarities employing the shared rhyme, *tawht / betawht*, and the shared fixation with numbers in Book 7 are striking. They perhaps have not received much attention as poetry because of the perceived ‘Mannerism’ of the rhyme and the perceived encyclopedic content. As with seemingly redundant rhymes, so with seemingly redundant numbers: at an initial reading, there seems no need to enumerate the begetting of each unnamed Patriarch. Gower uses many lines where a few would have sufficed; he ignores the human element of the narrative and privileges numbers over names.

This stylistic criticism of Gower’s encyclopedic urge has been lodged against Gower’s zodiac. Modern readers perhaps would prefer more myths, more astrology, more anything but his explanation of stars’ positions and quantity. Fox notes Maculay’s dismissal of the passage and concedes the following:

To assert that any particular passage in Gower’s writings is the dullest is to challenge controversy. Any jury sitting on the case, however, would be compelled to give due consideration to the lines in which he describes the stars of the zodiac. (7.979-1236). The painstaking enumeration of the stars in the head, belly, and tail of each sign seems altogether pointless.²³⁸

I would like to quote from the zodiac section at length not just to give seldom read poetry a chance, but because I want to make an argument about the pervasive fixation on numbers and their slotted places within the constellations of the entire zodiac, not just for one incidental sign. Genius begins with Aries, and I will quote the lines from Aries through Virgo, adding italics to underscore the placement of stars:

And as it seith in *Almageste*,
Of sterres twelve upon this beste
Ben set, wherof in his degré
The wombe hath tuo, the heved hath thre,

²³⁸ Fox, *Mediaeval Sciences*, 65.

*The tail hath sevene, and in this wise,
As thou myht hiere me devise,
Stant Aries, which hot and drye
Is of himself, and in partie
He is the receipte and the hous
Of myhty Mars the bataillous . . .*

*Taurus the seconde after this
Of signes, which figured is
Unto a bole, is dreie and cold;
And as it is in bokes told,
He is the hous appourtient
To Venus, somdiel discordant.
This bole is ek with sterres set,
Thurgh whiche *he hath hise hornes knet
Unto the tail of Aries,
So is he noght ther sterreles.*
Upon his brest ek eyhtetiene
*He hath, and ek, as it is sene,
Upon his tail stonde othre tuo.*
His monthe assigned ek also
Is Averil, which of his schoures
Ministreth weie unto the floures.*

*The thridde signe is Gemini,
Which is figured redely
Lich to tuo twinnes of mankinde,
That naked stonde; and as I finde,
Thei be with sterres wel bego:
The heved hath part of thilke tuo
That schyne upon the boles tail,
So be thei bothe of o parail;
But on the wombe of Gemini
Ben fyve sterres noght forthi,
And ek upon the feet be tweie,
So as these olde bokes seie,
That wise Tholomeus wrot . . .
Cancer . . .*

*Like to the crabbe he hath semblance,
And hath unto his retienance
Sextiene sterres, wherof ten,
So as these olde wise men
Describe, he berth on him tofore,
And in the middel tuo be bore,
And foure he hath upon his ende.
Thus goth he sterred in his kende . . .
The monthe of Juin unto this signe*

Thou schalt after the reule *assigne*.
 The fifte signe is Leo *hote*,
 Whos kinde is schape dreie and *hote* . . .
 And the semblance of his ymage
 Is a leoun, which in baillie
 Of sterres hath his pourpartie:
The foure, whiche as Cancer hath
Upon his ende, Leo tath
Upon his heved, and thanne nest
He hath ek foure upon his brest,
And on upon his tail behinde,
 In olde bokes as we finde . . .
 After Leo Virgo the nexte
 Of signes cleped is the sexte,
 Wherof the figure is a maide . . .
 . . . and soth to seie
 Sche is with sterres wel beseie,
Wherof Leo hath lent hire on,
Which sit on hih hir heved upon,
Hire wombe hath fyve, hir feet also
Have other fyve: and overmo
 Touchende as of complexion,
 Be kindly disposicion
 Of dreie and cold this maiden is . . . (7.1051ff, my italics)

As in the passage on the enumeration of the twelve Patriarchs categorized by their mothers, Gower is not content to record that Aries has twelve stars; he must inform us where they are positioned in the constellation's body. In all the signs, the stars are grouped into the sign's head, belly, and tail (or feet); or beginning, middle, and end. This categorizing seems to be the point of the description. In light of reading Gower alongside Merrill's poem, "b o d y," Gower's poem uses divided bodies and makes them understood anew by their parts. The zodiac, of course, was always understood as representing stars grouped into bodies, primarily animal ones; 'zodiac' comes from the Greek word for zoo, as Chaucer's *Treatise on the Astrolabe* informs us, "This forseide hevenyssh zodiak is clepid the cercle of the signes, or the cercle of the bestes, for 'zodia' in langage of Grek sowneth 'bestes' in Latyn tunge" (1.21.50ff). However, Gower avoids beastly metaphors and keeps the description rooted to the numbers and

the three bodily divisions of head, middle, and feet or tails. This representation of the zodiac signs as bodies with parts is not to be found in more commonly known astrological texts by Albumazar, Haly, Alcabitius, and others known to Chaucer and Dante.

Fortunately, George Fox discovered Gower's virtually unknown source in an astrologer named Alchandrus. Some eighty years after Fox's research, we still do not know much about this Arabic writer, nor are his manuscripts edited and printed, though their Latin and Hebrew manuscripts attest to their importance in the West. According to Fox, Gower's science has been misunderstood as a garbled version of the *Almagest* (the source Gower cites), when in fact he is drawing from Alchandrus' use of partial signs—head, middle, and feet—which resemble Alchandrus' division of the signs into the lunar mansions. The Hebrew Alchandrus manuscript, Codex Munchen, h. 73, goes so far as to state, "Every constellation of the zodiac is divided into three parts: Head, Navel, and End," and neglects to mention the lunar mansions.²³⁹

Most importantly, this Hebrew manuscript shares the most curious feature of Gower's zodiac, which are the several areas in which constellations overlap. Stars in such places must do double duty. In Gower's text quoted above, we see the following: (1) seven stars in Aries' tail are "knet" with Taurus' horns; (2) two in Taurus' tail serve also as Gemini's head (or heads); (3) four in Cancer's 'ende' sharing duty with Leo's head; (4) one on Leo's tail also serving as a star on Virgo's head. The use of the singular for Gemini's heads seems a mistake, yet it suits Gower's more stylized representation of the signs. Taurus' horns are mentioned because they are part of the animal's head, but otherwise the bodies of the signs are rendered similar in the possession of heads, stomachs, and feet or tails and similar in the flip-flop nature of

²³⁹ Fox, *Mediaeval Sciences*, 75.

stars acting as heads or feet, as the signs dictate. The Hebrew Alchandrus (but not the Latin version Fox used in his archival research) shares these double-duty stars.

Fox identified Alchandrus as the source, but it could be mentioned that Gower would have found hints of this tradition elsewhere. For example, the obsessive counting and positioning of each star can be found in a Bayeux miscellany MS. Laud misc. 644, fol. 8v. There, we are told (and shown in the illustration) how many stars can be found in the *caput* of each sign, but the author also enumerates stars to be found on various body parts, including knees, necks, or chests, or in the case of Cancer, we are informed of its three stars “*In dextro labro.*”²⁴⁰ Gower may have seen texts like these and then seized upon Alchandrus’ more systematic way of enumerating star positions restricted to three categories. Alchandrus’ way also takes the focus off the signs as beasts and stylizes their bodies: for the most part, in Gower and Alchandrus there is no mention of claws or mane or some such to differentiate Leo’s body from Cancer’s; indeed, Gower focuses on what they have in common, the stars that spell their existence. Nor do these stars ‘cancel’ one another out in an either/or relationship; it is not vaguely palimpsestuous like the image in al-Sufi’s *Book of Constellations*, MS. Hunt. 212, folio 40b, which maps out the figure of Cassiopeia with the Arab constellation of the Camel drawn over her in red.²⁴¹ The al-Sufi illustration explains how stars are employed into two separate zodiac systems; Gower’s double-duty stars work within the same system.

The positioning of the signs to establish points of connection via shared stars puts Gower’s zodiac at odds with other zodiac illustrations, such as, to name one example of many, an illustration from a fifteenth century German translation of

²⁴⁰ Evelyn Edson and E. Savage-Smith, *Medieval Views of the Cosmos* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2004), 36-37.

²⁴¹ Image from Edson and E. Savage-Smith, *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*; see also J. B. Harley, David Woodward, G Malcolm Lewis, *Cartography in the Traditional Islamic and South Asian Societies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 52.

Sacrobosco's *De sphaera*, in which Aries' head faces Taurus' tail, Taurus' head faces the back of one of the Gemini, Cancer faces Leo's tail—in other words, no constellation is looking the right way for stars to do double-duty in the way Gower and Alchandrus describe.²⁴² Only a minority of authors may have seen the constellations in a similar orientation, but as august a philosopher as Abraham Ibn Ezra may be counted among this minority in some respects. Ibn Ezra was fascinated by the shared space between Aries and Taurus, connecting it with Amos 5:8, which describes the Lord as “He who made Kesil and Khima, and turns deepest darkness into morning, and makes the day darken into night”; Ibn Ezra notes Talmudic tradition: “The opinion of our forefathers is that Khima is in the tail of [the zodiacal constellation of] Aries and the head of [the zodiacal constellation of] Taurus, and it consists of six stars which are visible even though small.”²⁴³ Ibn Ezra determined these were the equinoctial points.²⁴⁴ It is a fascinating connection because it is the Hebrew manuscript, not the Latin one that contains Alchandrus' double-duty stars shared between constellations.

I am not arguing that Gower knew this exact tradition and these Hebrew terms as such; the restoration through scientific discourse of various “forgotten biblical words,” which is central to Ibn Ezra's project, was geared for a Hebrew literate community, though Hebrew astronomy—*Jewes* [writing] *in Ebrew*—was recognized by Chaucer in his *Treatise on the Astrolabe* (*Treatise*, 32).²⁴⁵ In any case, the Douay-Rheims version of the verse in Amos names Arcturus and Orion, not Kesil and Khima; the Aries-Taurus connection was lost in translation. However, such concepts of zodiacal bodies divided into heads and tails were certainly being circulated, partly through the concept of the decans, which divide constellations into parts, to which

²⁴² Laura Ackerman Smoller, *History, Prophecy, and the Stars: the Christian Astrology of Pierre d'Ailly, 1350-1420* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 14.

²⁴³ Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra*, 258.

²⁴⁴ Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra*, 268.

²⁴⁵ Sela, *Abraham Ibn Ezra*, 1-2 and 93-96.

heads, middles, and feet or tails were logical building blocks. The constellation Draco was also divided into head and tail, each marking significant celestial points in relation to the ecliptic, with opposite astrological influences. The notion that double duty stars link constellations, outside of Hebrew astrology, seems rare indeed. In illustrations I have seen, as in the aforementioned page from MS. Laud misc. 644, the constellations are treated as distinct entities. Laud 644's layout, with a blurb on top and image underneath, looks ready for a scribe's penknife to cut out separate astrological baseball cards, so discrete are the images. From such illustrations it seems would-be astrologers gathered facts about each sign's stars, without trying to form a bigger picture of how they were spread out or what points of connection they shared.

In fact, the only attempts to piece together a "bigger picture" not related to the calendrical year, as in the Zodiac of the Labors of the Months, are narratological, and try to give the signs actions to explain their sequence. The Roman poet Manilius offers the classical example in the first book of his *Astronomica*:

aurato princeps Aries in vellere fulgens
 respicit admirans aversum surgere Taurum
 summisso vultu Geminos et fronte vocantem.
 quos sequitur Cancer, Cancrum Leo, Virgo Leonem.
 aequato tum Libra die cum tempore noctis
 attrahit ardenti fulgentem Scorpion astro.
 in cuius caudam contento dirigit arcu
 mixtus equo volucrem missurus iamque sagittam.
 tum venit angusto Capricornus sidere flexus;
 post hunc inflexa defundit Aquarius urna
 Piscibus assuetas avide subeuntibus undas,
 quos Aries tangit claudentis ultima signa.²⁴⁶

First Aries shining in his golden fleece
 Wonders to see the back of Taurus rise,
 Taurus, who calls, with lowered head, the Twins,
 Whom Cancer follows; Leo follows him,
 Then Virgo; Libra next, day equaling night,

²⁴⁶ The text is from The Latin Library, accessed online on July 18, 2009 at <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/manilius1.html>.

Draws on the Scorpion with its blazing star,
Whose tail the Half-horse aims at with his bow,
Ever about to loose his arrow swift.
Then comes the narrow curve of Capricorn,
And after him Aquarius pours from his urn
Waters the following Fishes greedily use,
Which Aries touches, last of all the signs.²⁴⁷

By ascribing actions to the signs, like Sagittarius aiming at Scorpio, Manilius tries to make the sequence look purposeful, but the actions are weak. There is a great deal too much following, calling, and wondering which could apply to any sign. Thomas Bradwardine (1290-1349) uses a similar strategy but ramps up the action (and violence) of the signs. Mary Carruthers comments,

But what is most surprising, to a puritan-formed sensibility, is the emphasis on violence and sexuality which runs through all the interaction of the figures in each scene. A super-white ram is kicked by a super-red bull with super-swollen testicles (so one will be sure one is not looking at a cow or a heifer), which the ram in turn kicks so hard that blood flows copiously. To its left, the ram is also kicking a rampant lion in the head, causing another wound. The lion is attacking a beautiful maiden, whose whole left arm is dreadfully swollen from the wound inflicted by a scorpion, which she is trying to balance with her scales. The twins are ripped from the womb of a woman whose parturitional wound extends to her breast. Or they are being born grotesquely from the bull. The twins are most beautiful, but one is being pinched grotesquely by a horrible crab, and is weeping while trying to free his hand, while his heartless twin caresses the monster 'in a childlike manner'... And the whole account concludes, matter-of-factly, with Bradwardine's comment that, having constructed such scenes, one can recite their contents 'in the order he wants, forwards or backwards.'²⁴⁸

Carruthers points out the irony of Bradwardine's violent zodiac, but her overall point is to show how memory is achieved through the vivid narrative. Memory is not Gower's project. His treatise seems closer to the calendrical flow of the signs for his description of the seasons under these stars, but central to his account are the stars ordered by their parts both shared and apart. Why would Gower be attracted to this esoteric mode of division and shared stars? Gower makes no use of the

²⁴⁷ S. Jim Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer, 1990), 31.

²⁴⁸ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 134.

prognosticating instructions which are the driving force behind Alchandrus' astrological text. Why, then, would Gower lift this one detail? Fox was on the right path when he remarked that Gower and Alchandrus (of the Hebrew mss) both seemed "more interested in fitting the pieces together than in the pieces themselves."²⁴⁹ This does seem to be the quintessential Gower: as we will see in the ensuing chapters, he spends a great deal of thought on the construction of bodies—including Nebuchadnezzar's Statue of Precious Metals, the Greek Pantheon as a body in Book 5, and the beast-peasants of the *Vox Clamantis*. How bodies are divided and whether they are joined in an orderly fashion will determine if the body made is beautiful or monstrous. It depends on the poetics that build the pieces into one form.

It is not important for readers to remember all the numbers in all the zodiac, and which stars are shared where. But Gower clearly wants readers to notice that this is happening—that constellations can be broken down to their essential elements, the stars, and that these stars define bodies and act as doorways between one body and the next. He wants readers, I argue, to appreciate the connectedness, the twined and twinned aspects of the signs. To that end he tells us that Taurus' horns *knit* with Aries tail, and Taurus' tail shares stars with Gemini's "heved" or head, "So be thei bothe of o parail" (7.1036, 1038). "Thei" ambiguously applies to the Twins as well as to Taurus and Gemini. Gower seems at pains to point out that Taurus and the Twins are also twins.

To that end, Gower's zodiac exudes harmony and balance as much as Arion's music, and similarly operates with technical precision—the precise ordering of numbered stars. The passage is literally poetry in motion (insofar as the sphere of fixed stars move with the changing of the equinoxes), or rather science embodied as poetry, in that the constellations work as couplets that rhyme with one another, and

²⁴⁹ Fox, *Mediaeval Sciences*, 76.

occasionally rhyme with *rime riche*, as with the “rhyme” of seven stars shared between Aries and Taurus, and the two between Taurus and Gemini. The ABC’s of *Algorismes* and literary mathematics have returned to mathematical literature. The four stars that make up the bottom part of Cancer also form the head of Leo, and the tail of Leo becomes the head of Virgo. Thus, there is not just a repetition of words but of stars, creating a *rime riche* in the sky with constellations that “rhyme” together.

The *rime riche* in passage is also liminal, moving from Cancer to Leo:

The monthe of Juin unto this *signe*
Thou schalt after the reule *assigne*.
The fifte signe is Leo *hote*,
Whos kinde is schape dreie and *hote* (1065-8; my italics)

The repetition is concurrent with the repetition of stars. Genius has already described the layout of Cancer’s stars. A few lines after this *rime riche* couplet, he brings up Cancer’s stars once more to declare their transformation in an act of celestial *rime riche*: “The foure, whiche as Cancer hath / Upon his ende, Leo tath /Upon his heved” (1073-5). Genius emphasizes not just the similarities but the differences in these stars that change into different body parts of different animals and people from sign to sign. There is surely a sense of play when a bull’s backside doubles as twins’ faces, and there is a topsy-turvy hierarchy in a Crab’s backend doubling as the noble Lion’s head—a strange crown indeed. Stars pun with as much semantic weight just as in *rime riche* and serve Gower’s project in fashioning a literary zodiac, in which bodies act like words.

Gower would not be the first to produce a work of literature offered as science. The classical poet Aratus’ *Phaenomena* set the precedent for writing more concerned with art than with scientific accuracy. Aratus’ stars are erratically positioned both in the text and in the classical and medieval illustrations that accompanied the verse. Manilius, in turn, reveled in the challenge of poeticizing astronomy, numbers and all.

For Gower, the constellations' divided body allowed *his* aesthetics to be inscribed in the heavens, his poetics of the play of a body's pieces to be stellified.

This argument that Gower turns the constellations into a literary zodiac can be complimented with Gower's own Latin glosses in the margins. Each constellation is given a two-part gloss: the first portion identifies the constellation and its corresponding month, and the second portion describes the seasonal changes under these stars. These second line descriptions are the following:

979ff. (h) Quo deus in primo produxit ad esse creata;
1015ff. (p) Quo prius occultas invenit herba vias.
1031ff. (h) Quo volucrum cantus gaudet de floribus ortis;
1051ff. (p) Quo falcat pratis pabula tonsor equis.
1067ff. (h) Quo magis ad terras expandit Lucifer ignes;
1081ff. (h) Quo vacuata prius pubes replet horrea messis.
1101ff. (p) Vinea quo Bachum pressa liquore colit.
1121ff. (h) Floribus exclusis yemis qui ianitor extat.
1141ff. (h) Quo mustum bibulo linquit sua nomina vino.
1169ff. (h) Ipse diem Nano noctemque Gigante figurat.
1185ff. (h) Quo Ianus vultum duplum conuertit in annum.
1215ff. (h) Quo pluuie torrens riparum concitat ampnes.

Under him God first produced created things
Under him the greenery first discovers the hidden pathways
Under him the song of birds rejoices at the emergence of flowers
Under him the shearer cuts the hay from the flat fields
Under him the morning star spreads his fires more across the earth
Under him the youth refill the emptied granaries with the harvests
Under him the vineyard, squeezed, honors Bacchus with its fluid
He stands as the gatekeeper of winter, keeping flowers out
Under him the wine-must changes its name to drinkable wine.
He fashions day as a dwarf, and night as a giant.
Under him Janus turns his double-face toward the year
Under him the torrent of rain showers incites the rivers from their banks.
(Trans. Andrew Galloway)

The literary quality of these glosses including the heavy anaphora and at least one line borrowed from Ovid's *Fasti*, is considered a proof of Gower's authorship. Moreover, Andrew Galloway discovered that these Latin lines actually scan as hexameter and pentameter verse, marked "h" and "p" above; taken together, they form elegaic

couplets and together comprise a “star poem” meant to be read as a whole.²⁵⁰ Thus, even the glosses link to one another through anaphora and as *couplets* and poetry. Thus gloss and text engage in a literary form of stellification, a way of talking about art as well as science through this rhetorical effect of meaningful repetition. For Gower, this kind of play is not just ornamental but the crucial building blocks of poetry. His verbal art makes us pay attention, and see poetry and science anew.

The linguistic and physical are yoked in such a way to suggest the conscious design of each of them. Words and bodies are carefully balanced and set, suggestive of a maker’s handiwork. In his chapter, “The Process of Stellification,” Dean Swinford discusses Peter Dronke’s notion of the “language mosaic” in the *Anticlaudianus* and pinpoints the link between stars and words, “set” as objects of craft:

...Peter Dronke notes “The ‘hermeneutic’ writers [. . .] had the impulse to create a language mosaic, in which archaisms, coinages, graecisms and glossary-words were set as so many exotically coloured stones, a language also where syntax tended to become grandiose, flamboyant and at times impenetrable.” Dronke’s use of the phrase “language mosaic” suggests the extent to which the stellar journey and the representation of that journey coincide. Words are “set” in a text in the same way that the stars are “set” in the unmoving outer sphere.²⁵¹

This shared sense of craftsmanship between God and poet guide their creative powers. The heavens are God’s verse, its prosody open to those who would explore God’s techniques. God “set” the planets in their places and fashioned the constellations just so. Poets emulate God’s sense of measurement; by measuring music, Arion measures the hearts of men, and in this way Gower connects speculative sciences with practical sciences, God’s model with man’s craft. Even the phrase from the Prologue, to “sette in love,” which describes the metamorphosis of hearts attuned to Arion’s song, is evocative of the language of Book 7

²⁵⁰ See the notes in Peck’s edition to lines 979ff.

²⁵¹ Quoted in Swinford, *Through the Daemon’s Gate*, 47.

throughout (Prol. 1068). To give a brief indication: sound is *set* before song (7.207); Earth is *set* in water to give the lands bounded shape (529); God *set* the planets in their places (962), stars are *set* in the constellations (985); kings *set* people in governance (1682); and Caesar with words pleaded with the senate “sette here hertes to pité” (1621). In all of these examples from the three branches of Aristotle’s instruction, there is an aspect of craftsmanship, be it the fashioning of the zodiac to setting words within a heart. Arion is a harper and Gower a poet, but Arion is a model who not only exhibits perfection in his craft, but that very perfection connects with or even influences everything around him. Gower draws all the sciences into this one poetic vision, modeled after sciences of measure and harmony and empowered to “sette in love” and bring all people a little closer to the heavens.

Chapter Six

*The Science of Eloquence: Linguistic Vertu
and Incest's Riddled Arithmetic*

The letter X will never disappear.
The more you cross it out, the more it's here.
—Richard Wilbur, from *The Disappearing Alphabet*²⁵²

In the preceding chapters, we have seen Gower's optimism for sciences such as astronomy and alchemy as well as for Arion's measure, while politics falls outside that theoretical sphere of perfect order. Words straddle an in-between place, paradoxically framing the perfection of sciences they themselves cannot attain. Poetic language is Gower's vehicle for expressing both these perfected and disordered states—crucially, there is art even in disorder. We saw in Chapter Two that in critiquing the rebels of 1381, Gower gives them the same power of *apocopa* that he applies to the monks whose *regula* is *gula*. He divides words to tease out other words hidden within. *Vox* 1 is essential for reading Gower's poetics, because in this book Gower underscores linguistic instability in terms of his own poetic practice. Rebels may divide words to the detriment of social order, but they possess the power of rebel poets.

Their access to language suggests something of the lapsarian poetics that Robert Hanning attributes to Chaucer, but not to Gower. Hanning wrote that Gower's poetry employs a "penitential poetics," and argued that Chaucer reacts against Gower and falls away from Gower's influence, allowing Chaucer to invent his more ethically nuanced and robust lapsarian poetics, a poetics which "embodies his new understanding of the advantages of poetic belatedness (and of its partner in crime, linguistic instability) in a text that appropriates and subverts discourses of estates criticism and confession" (31).²⁵³ Yet linguistic instability is precisely what

²⁵² Wilbur, *Collected Poems*, 571.

²⁵³ Robert W. Hanning, "Toward a Lapsarian Poetics for *The Canterbury Tales*," *SAC* 21 (1999), 27-58.

complicates Gower's poetry. In Book 4, Genius admits that Latin fails to retain the secrets of alchemy; in *Vox* 1, Gower's rebels employ syllabic play and turn the tables on the Latin estates satirist. Gower is sometimes misleadingly represented as a distant and omniscient author aiming his quiver at the flawed world, while Chaucer "is immediately and firmly located within the world he is describing."²⁵⁴ However, this statement glosses over various moments in which Chaucer distances himself and Gower confronts, such as the Rebellion of 1381, in which Gower describes himself fleeing for his life, which suggests that he was firmly if reluctantly located in that world, while Chaucer in *The Nun's Priest's Tale* converts that terror to a parodic beast fable. Hanning's distinction between the two authors conveniently contrasts Gower's top-down penitential structure with Chaucer's superior "social eloquence," but in fact Gower allots considerable social eloquence to marginalized members of society, such as the rebels of 1381.²⁵⁵ Linguistic instability is not something Gower elides but fosters—not to celebrate it universally, *per se*, but certainly to give floor-time to other voices.

As I discussed in the Introduction, these concepts of poetic belatedness and linguistic instability are richly treated in John Fyler's book length exploration of Chaucer, Jeun de Meun, and Dante, *Language and the Declining World*. Influenced by Hanning, Fyler sees Chaucer as a poet who celebrates the multiplicity and generative power of language, while Gower is at pains to repair its damage:

The only remedy for the arts misused, at best a partial remedy, is in the paradox that Gower outlines, by which *divisio*, the rational articulation of scholastic discourse, can try to undo the effects of *divisio* in the fragmentation of speech and minds at the beginning of human history.²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Hanning, 48.

²⁵⁵ Hanning, 30.

²⁵⁶ John Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, 29.

Gower is at least acknowledged for sensing linguistic instability, if that is partly what is meant by “arts misused,” and certainly Gower is invested in a project of social repair. However, repair is a more complicated process than a return to the ideal past, because linguistic instability was there early on, if not from the beginning. Arion was a bard of music, not of words, and returning to his art is an invitation to engage in a nonverbal process of repair in which division is part of the rhythm of harmony. This nonverbal music translates into social equality, in which shepherds and lords lay aside their differences and share joy in the music. Division, then, lends greater reflection on that past. Fyler invokes Rita Copeland’s notion that division is a divided thing, and one must combat one form of division with another, alternative form—scholastic division thus repairs social division. But there is another way of looking at this issue, which is that social division is not a weed to be cut with scholastic sheers but a parallel science in process. Sometimes the voice of reason in Gower’s poetry does not come from the top of the social ladder but from a member at the bottom. Social division is an opportunity for listening to these voices and restoring society to one of equal respect and balance.

Much of Chaucer’s multilingual poetics is based on the myriad tongues of discourse—”an almost intuitive yoking of language, character, and experience” as revealed from the mouths (or beaks) of narrators, tale-tellers, pilgrims, and even birds.²⁵⁷ Gower’s sense of language seems less varied because unlike the bustle of the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Confessio Amantis*’ frame story is peopled only with Genius as storyteller and Amans as audience. Besides this minimal cast of characters creating the appearance of straightforward dialogue, Gower also lends himself to a view of language as healthy and clear, when, in a series of rhyme words *forme / enforme*,

²⁵⁷ Michaela Paasche Grudin, *Chaucer and the Politics of Discourse* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), 2.

engagingly unpacked by James Simpson, which I discussed in Chapter One, Gower asserts the power of words to form the listener.²⁵⁸ In this pedagogic process, the fatherly Genius and his “sone” Amans take shape from the stories they tell and hear. Simpson aptly perceives the potential energy wrapped in the word *forme* as an occasion for metamorphosis and change; language and the metaphor of the body play off each other as stories are told, mythical protagonists are transformed, and the frame stories’ characters process these stories, until the moment Amans himself is made new.

Despite this ethical valence to *forme*, with its implied process of moral growth that positions Gower as the counterexample to Fyler’s and Hanning’s lapsarian poetics, *forme* in Gower has a way of getting divided, diverted, and changed altogether. Gower’s discussion of *forme* has much in common with his discussion of linguistic *vertu*: both words situate language in the realm of science and scientific order, and while scholars have traditionally linked Gower’s rhetorical treatise to the subsequent treatise on political science, I resituate rhetoric’s connection to the sciences. I argue that Gower contextualizes language in scientific discourse as a way of suggesting its potential for harmony and healing, although his discussion of rhetorical harmony inevitably involves him further in the very divisions that undermine linguistic transparency. Gower’s *vertu* is a divided word underscoring the contrast between verbal power and its virtue or vice, and Gower’s treatise thus centers on this destabilizing term. His is a lapsarian poetics insofar as his treatise falls away from the virtue of words even as he underscores their power.

This complicated division at the heart of rhetoric finds its most powerful and powerfully divided outlet in the riddle of generative paradox, especially Antiochus’ riddle from the *Tale of Apollonius* in Book 8 of the *Confessio* and Satan’s incest with

²⁵⁸ James Simpson, *Sciences and the Self*, 5-9.

Sin in the *Mirour de l'Omme*. Riddles are labyrinthine rhetorical devices that misdirect listeners through the most equivocal verbal arrangements. Verbal *vertu* and physical *forme* come into play in this verbal nexus in which words can decapitate a man or wed a daughter to a father. In the *Confessio*, male riddle masters are usually tyrants (though Gower opens the *Vox* as a riddle master). In Antiochus' case, the riddle is a mode of enacting incest and forging a family tree, allowing a father and daughter become all people to one another. Incest is inherent in riddling, in that riddles breed together familial pieces of a linguistic puzzle, and Antiochus' riddle is itself an incestuous act. Incestuous riddles are a linguistic and familial possibility Gower earlier explored in his Anglo-Norman *Mirour de l'Omme*, in which Satan's incestuous riddle prefigures Mary's divine mystery. There, too, Gower unexpectedly empowers Satan with this same linguistic instability, allowing him to serve as father figure of sacred history, teaching Mary the value of incestuous motherhood.

Antiochus, Appollonius, and Thaïse; Alphonse and Peronelle; Gower, Geoffrey of Vinsauf, Alan of Lille, and the rebels of 1381: these riddle masters literally make strange bedfellows as they trope on gender and sexuality or embody a gendered conflict between male and female riddle masters. Gower may not celebrate linguistic instability, as Fyler argues that Chaucer does, but riddles are ingrained in his poetics of division. Gower can praise plain speech, present Genius and Amans in a father-son relationship, or ally himself with Apollonius, but Antiochus is the looming father figure to Gower's rhetorical project, the force who brings power if not virtue to speech. Likewise, Gower can scorn the Devil and Sin's prolific powers with his anaphora harping on their propagation of "nothing," which is nothing insofar as it is really a division of their own sinful attributes into incestuously born daughters, yet that same intangible "nothing" is the secret to all rhetorical power—to Satan's and his own. Wordplay that characters like Antiochus and Sin exploit resembles the same

wordplay that Gower uses as a poet. That incest is a riddle to Gower suggests his worry over linguistic instability yet his fostering of its productive, divided discourse. Riddles are not shunned but marked as central moments in his text, points of *vertu* that question the poet's problematic identity as a literary son and a seeker of social harmony.

Linguistic *Vertu*: The Science of Eloquence

It has been noted that Gower's treatise on rhetoric, found in Book 7 of the *Confessio Amantis*, is the first of its kind in vernacular English, though James Murphy qualifies Gower's accomplishment when he states that Gower cites Tullius yet "probably had no occasion to read his works."²⁵⁹ Gower's little document appears sandwiched between the much larger treatises on *Theorique* (theology and the physical sciences) and *Practique* (politics). By placing rhetoric between theory and practice, Gower has taken liberties with his source text, *Li Livres du Tresor*, Brunetto Latini's thirteenth-century compilation text, which discusses theory, logic, and practice, of which rhetoric is enlisted in the service of politics (though Brunetto's third book is largely on rhetoric). This decision of placement and order gives Gower's rhetoric a different flavor from the *Tresor's* tool of persuasion for civic ends. His opening words are pointedly moral:

The hihe makere of natures
The word to man hath gove alone,
So that the speche of his persone,
Or for to lese or for to winne,
The hertes thought which is withinne
Mai schewe, what it wolde mene
And ther is noghwhere elles sene
Of kinde with non other beste.

²⁵⁹ Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, 96.

So scholde he be the more honeste
To whom God gaf so gret a gifte,
And loke wel that he ne schifte
Hise wordes to no wicked us;
For word the techer of vertus
Is cleped in Philosophie. (7.1508-13)

In spirit, his text resembles Dante's *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, in which speech is "to communicate to others the concepts formed in our minds."²⁶⁰ In Dante, as in Gower, rhetoric is for all people; not a tool but a pleasure ["ad placitum"] (3.3) and "tante dotis," which can mean a great "gift" (5.2) but *dos* can also signify a dowry, an appropriate word insofar as language is God's gift and dowry for humanity as the bride of Christ. Gower's great gift, however, comes strangely wrapped in inverted syntax that complicates the mediation between thought and speech, belying the "pleine wordes" Gower praises and is known for (7.1534). Gower places the direct and indirect objects "[t]he word to man" before the verb, and again in the next independent clause, of which the noun "speche" is followed by a dependent clause, the direct object, and another dependent clause. All this is to say that "the word" and "speche" are syntactically divided from their verbs even as Gower makes a similar point about speech as the force to stop the division between what is on one's lips and what is in one's heart.

The moral tenor of this passage, stressing the purpose of speech as honesty ("So scholde he be the more honeste"), links rhetoric to the political discussion to follow, and the exemplum of Catiline's trial further cements this pairing of rhetoric and politics. In her book, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth*, Elizabeth Allen discusses how this political exemplum illustrates rhetoric. Silenus and Cicero's plain appeals to justice, which amount to a death sentence for Catiline, are outweighed by

²⁶⁰ "Si etenim perspicaciter consideramus quid cum loquimur intendamus, patet quod nihil aliud quam nostre mentis enucleare aliis conceptum." *Vulgares Eloquentes*, ed. Gianfranco Folena, University of Padua, 1968. Translation by Marianne Shapiro, *De Vulgari Eloquentia: Dante's Book of Exile*, University of Nebraska, Lincoln: 1990, Book 1, chapter 2.3, page 48.

Julius Caesar's eloquent appeal to mercy. Allen reveals that the exemplum favors eloquence rather than a "tale plein withoute frounce" praised the very line before that same exemplum (7.1594).²⁶¹

Notwithstanding the vital, forward-looking bridge from rhetoric to politics, the foundational, backward-looking connection between rhetoric and the physical sciences must be addressed to understand what words are for and what they can do. In the process, I hope to explain how these two parts fit together—the scientific discourse followed by the political exempla in the third section of Book 7. In so doing, I will show the value in Gower's text as a rhetorical document, in contrast to the easy dismissal by Murphy, who was looking for clearer Ciceronian source material, not for a view of rhetoric positioned in relation to science.

Gower makes his scientific lens clear from the outset, though the priority and valuing of philosophy's three branches is less clear. Initially, Gower seems confident of the word's equality with, even supremacy over, nature. He says as much in his Latin header to the section on rhetoric:

*Herba, lapis, sermo, tria sunt virtute repleta,
Vis tamen ex verbi pondere plura facit.*

Herb, stone, speech are all three full of power; but the force from the weight of a word does more.

This trinity of *materia medica* can be found in a number of Latin and vernacular medical texts, studied in Louise Bishop's *Words, Stones, & Herbs*. Among several examples she discusses, Gilbertus Anglicus's *Compendium medicinae* ends with the words, "To þre þinges God ȝeueþ vertu: to worde, to herbis, and to stonis. Deo gracias."²⁶² Bishop notes the connection between the somatic, cosmic, and rhetorical in this triad. Reading is not the activity solely of the mind, as think of it today, but of

²⁶¹ Elizabeth Allen, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth*, 68.

²⁶² Bishop, *Words, Stones, & Herbs*, 92.

the body, which explain the medical analogies in Aristotle's work on rhetoric and Isidore's *Etymologiae*, and Bishop and Jean Leclercq comment on the physical and medicinal effects of reading.²⁶³

It is too bad Bishop does not cite Gower, because he writes of words, herbs, and stones in Latin, Anglo-Norman, and English, a trilingual exploration which attests to Gower's long-term fascination with the connection between words and things. The passage from his *Mirour de l'Omme* is not too different from Gilbertus Anglicus' statement of God's three-fold division of power:

Om dist que dieus en trois parties
Ad grandes vertus departies;
Ce sont, sicomme l'en vait disant,
Paroles, herbes et perries;
Par ceaux fait homme les mestries
Et les merveilles tout avant (25585-90)

It is said that God divided things of great power into three parts: these are (as they say) words, herbs, and stones. With them a man can do great feats and marvels.

Gower's sense of God's will dividing and investing these three things with power concurs with medieval practice in medicine, lapidaries, and other scientific and religious documents.²⁶⁴ God seems to sanction this division, though attitudes toward their uses differed. Thomas Aquinas confirmed the power in stones and herbs and condones their use (he mentions magnets specifically), but cautioned that the power of words should not be added to them; writing words on stones to enhance their power may open up the practitioner to the Devil.²⁶⁵ Gower's passage, in turn, criticizes not a sinister efficacy to pairing words and stones but those who hoodwink others with false goods. Gower's statement of "Paroles, herbes et perries" is part of his section on

²⁶³ Bishop, *Words, Stones, & Herbs*, 85. Leclercq, *Love of Learning*, 15.

²⁶⁴ Sylvia Huot, "Lapidaries," in *Medieval France: An Encyclopedia*, by William W. Kibler, Grover A. Zinn (Routledge, 1995), 524.

²⁶⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, Translated by Fathers of the English Dominican Province (BiblioBazaar, 2007), Second Article, II, II, Q.96, Art. 2, 431.

Fraud, and he writes of the deceits of alchemy, staged “mervailles” that exploit people’s respect for “perries” as part of a divine order. Despite the abuses of this system, Gower’s wording of God’s involvement (“dieus en trois parties / Ad grandes vertus departies”) resembles that of medieval medical texts: the “mervailles” can be real.

“The phrase ‘words, stones, and herbs’ elicits a meditation on the relationship between words and healing,” writes Bishop, and in her study the relationship is one of equality.²⁶⁶ In Gilbertus Anglicus’ quotation, and in the others which Bishop compiles, the three *materia* are presented as equal members of a team. In Gower’s Latin header in the *Confessio*, however, it is a one-sided relationship: the word is unequivocally supreme. It “plura facit,” does more than herbs and stones, but the strong statement leads to a question: does more *what?* Gower’s Latin endorsement of the word is soon followed by a rough translation and an important expansion that hints at what Gower left unsaid in Latin:

In ston and gras vertu ther is,
Bot yit the bokes tellen this,
That word above alle erthli thinges
Is vertuous in his doinges,
Wher so it be to evele or goode. (1545-9)

In the Latin and those first four Middle English lines, Gower repositions this medical and scientific phrase in a rhetorical context. Gower’s references to unspecified “bokes” asserting linguistic power “above alle erthli thinges” are intriguing. In the *Mirour*, God divided things (the rhyme *parties / departies* underscores the unity behind this division) of power into words, herbs, and stones, but in his *Confessio* Gower revises this portrait of God’s action and keeps this lore with the matter of books (*bokes tellen this*). What kind of books is Gower talking about—books by

²⁶⁶ Bishop, *Words, Stones, & Herbs*, 92-93.

Tullius or books by all the astronomical authors in the preceding sixty lines, which mention Ptolemy, Hermes, and other astrologers (7.1546-7)? The context suggests that scientific books led to Gower's comparison of stones and grass, of which he enumerates in his previous section on the Benician stars, as they are sometimes called, the fifteen most astrologically influential stars. Though Gower has elsewhere criticized astrology in relation to man's free will, here he seems attracted to the stars' measurable properties and affinities. If it can be categorized, it can be known, and part of that categorization and authentication process is the yoking of a star with its companion herb and gem: "to everich on / A grass belongeth and a ston" (1305-6). Like rhetoric's Latin header and translated paean to rhetoric, this astrological passage takes interest in the "vertu" of these stones and herbs (1318, 1327, 1405).

The "vertu" in stones and grass recall Chaucer's opening lines from the *General Prologue* describing April showers and May flowers as an intimate, chemical process in which rain bathes "every veyne in swich licour / Of which vertu engendred is the flour" (GP 3-4). Gower, too, is interested in natural processes, but he seeks a direct comparison with verbal ones. Like alchemy, in which many materials are processed to produce gold and elixir, men harness such astral and earthly powers to affect both realms and "worchen many a wonder / To sette thing bothe up and under" (1307-8). Like those glorious stars, rhetoric reigns supreme, and Gower in writing about learned books contributes his own, part rhetorical treatise, part document of physical science.

Insofar as it surpasses the "vertu" of stone and grass and is mentioned alongside them, rhetoric straddles discourses of astrology, herbology, gemology, and even Arion's *measure*. Some lines down Gower writes that animals, though lacking speech, have enough receptive linguistic susceptibilities to be controlled by them: "With word the wilde beste is daunted, / With word the serpent is enchanted" (1565-

6). With this lulling anaphora, Gower demonstrates how wild beasts might be tamed through language—not through its sense but its sound. Such an approach to rhetoric resembles the Prologue’s depiction of Arion’s golden age of harmony achieved through sound than for any particular message sung. Then and in Gower’s time, the human voice transcends human communities and pacifies the natural world, the more so because communication does not hinge on content but delivery. Rhetoric here is the vapor that calms the angry bees: a biological rather than intellectual effect.

Gower lays particular pressure on that word, “vertu” when he claims, “word above alle erthli thinges / Is vertuous” (7.1547-8); he makes a similar repetition in the Latin header with “virtute” and “vis,” two etymologically linked words (the plural of *vis* is *vires*; both stem from *vir*, man). The word “vertuous” seems to invoke a modern sense of moral goodness, until Gower jarringly retracts this suggestion with the qualified subsequent line, “Wher so it be to evele or to goode.” Up until now, the passage celebrated what ostensibly seemed good and a natural part of creation. This is not virtue, though, but power, signified by the Latin word *vis*, force, at *vertu*’s (*virtue*’s) root. Unlike the force possessed by a precious stone or a healing herb, words carry an ethical force, which is language’s special gift and thereby burden, if we are to read “pondere plura facit” as an onus on the speaker to use those weighted words not *vis*-fully but virtuously.

In Gower’s last clause hovering between evil and goodness, Gower stresses the ambivalence of language’s ethical leanings. The next lines insinuate language’s inclination toward evil:

For if the wordes semen goode
And ben wel spoke at mannes ere,
Whan that ther is no trouthe there,
Thei don fulofte gret deceipte;
For whan the word to the conceipte
Discordeth in so double wise,
Such Rethorique is to despise (1550-6)

For the sake of discussion I have split these two passages quoted above, but when brought together, a reader would notice the *rime riche* of “goode” rhyming with “goode.” I mention this because Gower brings together these words, repeats them, throws in an adverb of speaking “wel”—crams us with goodness, as it were—and then undercuts this seeming abundance of goodness as part of an illustration of deceit; that linguistic falseness is how deceit works, Gower seems to be saying.

Curiously, it is also how allegory works. In *The Language of Allegory*, Maureen Quilligan elaborates on the centrality of verbal play in allegory and the author’s aim to turn the reader’s attention away from the plot and onto the words on the page, with the result that “the reader will become conscious of the significance of these words—of the very process by which they do in fact signify, signifying not only the action, but the meaning of that action . . . it is to read with an eye on the magic truth inherent in the words themselves, which also happen to be capable of communicating the story.”²⁶⁷ This is the essential Gower, a writer captivated by the magic inherent in words. The reason Gower falls below Quilligan’s radar here despite his trilingual corpus of allegories, is perhaps that his verbal play itself is so natural sounding that it can be missed or dismissed as unintended. Rhyming “goode” and “goode” and referring to speaking “wel,” all in three lines, may be incidental, but I think not. It is not the usual pun like Langland’s “just” and “joust,” but even setting aside the polysemous “vertu” of rhetoric, which is a pun Gower is at pains to make us trip over, Gower’s “goodness” is just as much a loaded rhetorical act. The word

²⁶⁷ Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979). 68.

goodness employs “vertu”—not virtue, but the power of speech that sharply changes shape as we read. It is not necessarily a virtuous thing for goodness to do.

Gower’s rhetorical use of goodness is not unlike Quilligan’s discussion of a more modern allegorical tale, Herman Melville’s *Confidence Man*. She notes that the story centers around words “taken and mistaken,” and she quotes Melville’s sly description of the man:

But, considering that goodness is no such rare thing among men—the world familiarly knows the noun; a common one in every language—it was curious that what so signalized the stranger, and made him look a kind of foreigner, among the crowd (as to some it may make him appear more or less unreal in this portraiture), was but the expression of so prevalent a quality. [P. 39] (89)

The weight Melville places on the word goodness, heaping parenthetical asides of its mundane ubiquity, creates friction with the underlying implication that the man appears a little *too* good, which is to say false. Quilligan notes that Melville poses the “question basic to all allegory—do words lie, or do they thrust at truth?”²⁶⁸ Gower’s alchemy and astrology present words trying, or failing, to keep up with science to share in the truths of natural philosophy. The science of words themselves, rhetoric, is another matter, and Gower takes up Quilligan’s question in the tradition of allegory as a sounding board to explore language’s dual edge.

Suiting a discussion of “science,” Gower’s passage on goodness conveys a mathematical explication of how multiplied words cancel one another out (1523).

Words have power, says Genius,

Wher so it be to evele or goode.
For if the wordes semen goode
And ben wel spoke at mannes ere,
Whan that ther is no trouthe there,
Thei don fulofte gret deceipte;

²⁶⁸ Quilligan, *Language of Allegory*, 90.

For whan the word to the conceipte
Descordeth in so double a wise,
Such Rethorique is to despise (7.1548-56)

“Double a wise” means a negation of wisdom, not an addition of it, and by proximity the words apply to the passage’s doubled rhyme on “goode,” rendered duplicitous (7.1555). The double is a trope found throughout the *Confessio*. In the Prologue we read too that lawyers “take hire double face, / So that justice out of the weie / With ryhtwisnesse is gon aweie,” again reinforcing the concept of duality with stylistic duality, as “weie” calls to its schematic twin (by schematic I refer to the rhyme scheme) and semantic antonym, “aweie” (Prol. 130-2). In Book 5, Usury “hath ordeined of his sleyhte / Mesure double and double weyhte” (5.4397-8). The double often amounts to hypocrisy and falseness, in authority, music, and language. Later in this chapter we will look at the riddle as the crystallization of double-speak, for Quintilian associates *aenigma* with *ambages* (vi.iii.51), and Chaucer brings out *aenigma*’s double faces: “ambages / That is to seyn, with double words slye, / Swiche as men clepen a word with two visages (TC 5.897-9).

Even the term “bilingual” connoted false duality to trilingual Gower: in his Latin header to Book 2.iv, False-Semblant is termed “*bilinguis*,” two-tongued. The word signals a duality of intention rather than duality of languages, though that too is not far from discussion in this bilingually-charged moment in this bilingual poem. Duality of speech, which violates an ethical principle of honestly translating what is in one’s head into words, is False-Semblance’s *sine qua non*, as it is with any riddle master. Gower certainly uses doubled words and meanings to great positive effect in the *Confessio*, (the literally charming anaphora on taming beasts and snakes is a good example), but doubled language is a cue to give notice, and when the issue is addressed directly, it can be a target of ethical proportions, with all the onus of

language on it since Solomon's adage that life and death are in the power of the tongue—*linguis*, language.

This ethical dimension is a turn-away from the straightforward discourse on the physical universe. There, stars are knit in a system of complete harmony. Here, by contrast, words unsettle the universe:

The word under the coupe of hevене
Set everything or odde or evene (7.1579-80)

The couplet recalls the earlier one on stars, stones, and herbs, “Wherof men worchen many a wonder / To sette thing bothe up and under” (7.1307-8). It is the unsettling power to parse, scan and edit the universe like a line. To Gower, words have remarkable, even medicinal properties and heal men when medication fails. In his *Poetria Nuova*, Geoffrey of Vinsauf had called words physicians (*PN* 105ff), but he was applying the metaphor to the realm of rhetoric alone: words are physicians to words, not to men. Gower's words are “charmes” with physical results, not the work of Geoffrey of Vinsauf's ‘conjurer’ whose magic is the magic of good rhetoric, a know-how of ordering a text (7.1568; *PN* 120ff). By contrast, Gower's lines on healing tie rhetoric again with scientific discourse in which stones and herbs exhibit consistent properties, though words have a way of breaking boundaries and revealing powers over the physical world. Natural objects seem miraculous, but that is not precisely so: they do their jobs and can be used as any other object, provided men know their properties, processes, and uses (hence the failure of alchemy in Gower's era is not a failure of metals but a failure of translating the texts that contained alchemical truths). Words *can* heal—or devastate.

Gower calls rhetoric a “science, / Which hath the reule of eloquence,” but this science has an arbitrary rule with shifting ethical valences (7.1543-4). Words seem in conflict with the physical word, for they “Set everything or odde or evene,” but that

very language echoes the manner in which astrologers use potent nature “To sette thing bothe up and under” (1307-8). Moreover, the phrase “odde or evene” suggests a mathematical precision to language. Words seem to work in numerical avenues and numerical terms, much as Pythagoras saw shared ratios between the notes of the octave on a lyre’s strings and the motion of the musical spheres. Such synergies bring us back to Arion’s lyre and the harmony of science.

There is also that curious infinitive, “set.” What does it mean to set things odd or even? Is it the same for the rhetorician to set things odd or even as it is for the astrologer to set them up or down? Gower invokes the connection again a few lines down with more suggestively scientific language:

Bot for to loke upon the lore
Hou Tullius his Rethorique
Componeth, ther a man mai pike
Hou that he schal hise wordes sette,
Hou he schal lose, hou he schal knette,
And in what wise he schal pronounce
His tale plein withoute frounce. (7.1588-94)

Although Murphy dismissed this passage’s scant references to grammar and logic and the name dropping of Tullius, the debt this passage acknowledges is a scientific one that describes rhetoric as a science. Those rhyme words convey a creator’s design: *pike, sette, knette*. *Pronounce* cinches the project as a verbal act, without *frounce* because of the detailed order having already been invested. So, too, did God pronounce, “Let there be light,” and light was not only made, but quantified insofar as light and darkness were separated and given their own adjoining places, a process summed up in the same verbs, *pike, sette, knette*.

Pike might evoke a creator’s omniscient view; so do the other two infinitives, though they also convey precision and the order so evident in the cosmos. Not just order—connectedness. In my chapter on astronomy, I have already discussed the starry link between Taurus and Aries:

This bole is ek with sterres set,
Thurgh whiche he hath hise hornes knet
Unto the tail of Aries (7.1021-3)

Here, too, stars are set and knit. Though “knet” is used only once in the zodiac passage, the sense of the signs being connected by their shared stars so that “be thei bothe of o parail” is evident throughout the passage (1038). The verb “set” or “sette” appears also in lines 961 and 985 though its meaning too is implied throughout the constellations and planets.

How can words be chosen, set, and knit like the heavenly bodies? Gower conveys this purposeful sense of verbal craft even as he draws attention to its capricious duality:

The wordes ben of sondri sectes,
Of evele and eke of goode also;
The wordes maken frend of fo,
And fo of frend, and pes of werre,
And werre of pes, and out of herre
The word this worldes cause entriketh,
And reconsileth whan him liketh.
The word under the coupe of hevne
Set everything or odde or evene;
With word the hihe God is pleased,
With word the wordes ben appesed,
The softe word the loude stilleth;
Wher lacketh good, the word fulfilleth,
To make amendes for the wrong;
Whan wordes medlen with the song,
It doth plesance wel the more. (1572-87)

This passage follows on the heels of words as healing “charmes” and the “karectes” of sorcery, a curious comparison, because such charms were categorized among superstitious practices in Augustine’s *On Christian Doctrine*.²⁶⁹ Gower almost seems

²⁶⁹ Augustine Book 2.20: “Here also belong those amulets and remedies which medical science also condemns, whether these involve enchantments, or certain secret signs called “characters,” or the hanging, tying, or in any way wearing of certain things, not for the purpose of healing the body, but because of certain significations, either occult or manifest.” *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D. W. Robertson, Jr (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill Educational Publishing, 1984), 55.

to flaunt language's magic, for his lines are a parade of charms (7.1568, 1571). The passage begins with good and evil and ends resoundingly with good—or something that slyly sounds like it. “Wher lacketh good, the word fulfilleth,” as though words can substitute for that absolute value. The flip from war to peace and peace to war, coupled with Genius' unflappable delivery, is oddly amoral, as though Genius stands above the human scene in all its folly. The descriptive writing but never advocates how language *should* be used, merely how it *is* used. There is something persuasive yet profane in the anaphora and rhyme: “With word the hihe God is pleased, / With word the wordes ben appesed,” as though both God's pleasure and linguistic self-appeasement were part of the same formula, and God could be so manipulated just like the warring men on Earth below. The unorthodox suggestion ignores Psalm 51, in which God scorns burnt offerings and desires contrition; it seems unlikely that a well-turned speech would deceive a deity who sees within the human heart. Pleasing God with words seems duplicitous, and in fact, *pleasant* acts elsewhere in Gower are shady deeds. In Gower's *Mirour*, Satan and Sin's “plesant desport” allow father and daughter to cheat sexual mores by having a son; Sin and her brood win souls through pleasure; and toward the end of the book, a jeweler swindlers victims with his “plesant” tricks (MO 219, 25592).²⁷⁰ The concluding lines on music invoke the age of Arion once more, but surpassing Arion's achievement, for music is made better “Whan wordes medlen with the song.” This brief passage moves from goodness to “plesance,” and so seductive is the writing, that we do not at first notice the shift into ethically ambiguous territory.

Part of the passage's “charmes” is the hypnotic repetition—again, that doubled quality to words. Even as Gower cautions readers of linguistic fickleness that make

²⁷⁰ On the word *pleasant*, Wilson quotes Cotgrave: “used verie often ironically or in evil part.” Wilson, 408, n. 134.

“frend of fo, / And fo of frend, and pes of werre, / And werre of pes,” he tosses us a coil of repeated words that convey charged connections even as they grace us with simple diction in which monosyllabic words are clustered with nouns, modifying prepositional phrases, and caesurae. The anagrams are all of the simplest sort, merely the same words mirrored in reverse order, but suggestive nonetheless. In the first phrase, alliteration turns words inside out, converting friend into “of” and finally reverses “of” into “fo.” Slippery “fo” when flipped alternates back as the preposition, and through verbal legerdemain transforms back into its alliterative partner “frend.” Belaboring the metamorphoses, Gower forces us to see word play where normally we would see none. The words have the flavor of being flexible, able to be reordered without consequence, such as rewriting the line to “fo of frend, / And frend of fo,” but the social consequence of these processes are enormous and potentially devastating.

This is yet another instance of words morphing into other words and transformations taking place on multiple levels. Wordplay, of course, is often at work in parallel to various Ovidian metamorphoses, such as Callisto’s metamorphosis into a bear serving as an occasion for rhyming *bere* with *forbere*. These verbal mutations extend to satiric shifts, like Gower’s scorn at clergy who swap “chalk for cheese” from the Prologue, which captures another type of *frend / fo* conversion (416).²⁷¹ The chalk does not really become cheese, but then again, one wonders about the strength of the *frend / fo* conversion. How lasting are these changes, how true?

It is a question posed many times throughout the *Confessio*, and intimately connected to this question is the theme of a better era (either in the remote past or utopian future) contrasted to Gower’s present day. Besides grounding verbal play in these acts of economic swindling, Gower portrays social disorder in these terms of a topsy-turvy loss of proportion and the end of a better era:

²⁷¹ See Introduction and Chapter Four for a discussion of the phrase, “chalk for cheese.”

Of mannes herte the corage
Was schewed thanne in the visage;
The word was lich to the conceite
Withoute semblant of deceite.
Tho was ther unenvied love,
Tho was the vertu sett above
And vice was put under fote.
Now stant the crop under the rote. (Prol. 111-8)

The era of faces without guile and words without deceit has passed. There is no alliteration or anagrams here as in the chalk for cheese or the friend for foe, but the linguistic “vertu” works in the background. Here, language is not bringing in an age better than Arion’s harmonious world but the reverse, a world where vice is unhampered and virtue is under foot. The crops stand (or stand flipped) metaphorically for the flipped nature of men and language. Hearts also have roots, and these have been perverted, so that what we see on a man’s face or from a man’s mouth does not reflect the corruption within. Virtue has been suppressed by “vertu.”

Alchemy, as we have seen, is an art of the past because its secrets were lost in translation, a failure of Latin learning and Latin language. Yet not all alchemy is lost, and this conversion of friend into foe and back again dangles between the antonyms like a swinging door. Language turns lead into gold. Or the reverse. That is the difference between the processes and that moral issue at the heart of the word *vertu*. In a similar vein, Dante writes, “Et quid maioris potestatis est quam quod humana corda versare potest, ita ut nolentem volentem et volentem nolentem faciat, velut ipsum et fecit et facit?” (1.17.4-5) [For what has greater power than something which can change the human heart, making the unwilling willing, and the willing unwilling, as this vernacular has done and continues to do?”]²⁷² The passage is not one of change alone but verbal change, that is, poetry: in Dante’s *versare*, the word “verse” is not far off from the vernacular’s metamorphoses immediately before this passage, in which

²⁷² Translated by Robert S. Haller in *The Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri* (University of Nebraska Press, 1974).

“uncouth words, confused constructions, and defective pronunciations and rustic accents...emerge so noble, so clear, so perfect, and so polished as may be seen in the songs of Cino of Pistoia and his friend.”²⁷³ The vernacular can be put in verse and can *versare*, can turn, the hearts of others, a turning measured in turns of phrase. By repeating “the unwilling willing, and the willing unwilling,” Dante, too, juxtaposes words that easily fold into a very similar-looking word with an antithetical meaning.

By manipulating words at the level of the syllable, adding and subtracting prefixes, Gower also demonstrates in a word the power of persuasion and the proximity of alchemical change and metamorphoses in ordinary language and household items. As I discussed in Chapter Four, there is a simple, casual feel to Gower’s metaphors of social disorder: friends and foes, feet that wear gloves, crops under roots. Gower notes the oddity of disorder in words and the world—their riddling quality. His language is simple yet connected as precisely as the stars. *Pike, sette, knette, pronounce*. Words form verbal constellations that connect head to tail, though not with the same flavor of divine design. They bring war and peace, enmity and friendship. They are riddles of the human condition that we have set to ourselves.

The Riddle of Tyranny

A glance through Eleanor Cook’s *Riddles and Enigmas* will show that there was always a small but passionate medieval subculture devoted to this lesser known rhetorical trope.²⁷⁴ If attitudes toward the tongue were divided in the debate between eloquence and plain speech, perspectives on the riddle list on the pejorative side. Cicero, for example, warns against needless obscurities that riddles indulge in.

²⁷³ Translated by Shapiro.

²⁷⁴ Eleanor Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles in Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006). I am indebted to Cook for her survey of the riddle from Cicero to modern times.

Others, however, recognized that riddles hold visionary capacity to rethink the mundane or to acquire sacred lore. To Augustine, the trope of enigma is a way to understand who we are in relation to God: “For now I see in a glass darkly [in *aenigmata*], but then I shall know even as I am fully known.” Paul’s I Corinthians 13:1 riddle plays off a prefiguring verse in Numbers 12:8: “With him [Moses] I will speak mouth to mouth, even apparently, and not in dark speeches; and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold.” A riddle can adumbrate divine knowledge that will one day be met face to face.

Riddles, then, are things of visionary power—paradoxically so, for they are also blinding in their labyrinthine obfuscations. Solomon wrote that “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Prov. 18:21). That linguistic fruit and that *virtu* for good or evil, life or death, are addictive, as Gower makes clear in the *Confessio*. Edward Craun emphasizes flattery and backbiting as the heart of Gower’s deviant speech, for these insinuate the care and feeding of royalty though twisted words.²⁷⁵ However, it seems that the heart of deviant speech in Gower is the riddle. Unlike flattery, which are words often directed to one higher up socially, the riddle is often cast to those below oneself, as a mode to subject them further. If kings should be concerned with the care and feeding of commoners, riddles are a Sphinxine indulgence that enable the king to feed upon his

²⁷⁵ Edwin D. Craun, *Lies, slander, and obscenity in medieval English literature : pastoral rhetoric and the deviant speaker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 72. Craun posits exactly this addiction to deviant speech as the driving plot and ethical centerpiece of Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*. Such misuse of language, he argues, is important to Gower’s confessional structure but also his larger, social vision: not just lovers, but the broader community and nations are affected by poisoned words. Craun focuses exclusively on flattery and backbiting to argue that Amans’ deviant speech applied in his personal life is of the same sort that infect whole realms, and that Genius’ choice of exempla is designed to reflect the evil that he means to uproot. Kings give in to flattery just as Amans gives into his own fantasies of love; backbiting rivals in love is tantamount to Allee’s knight and mother undermining Constance and the health of the king’s marriage and the state (here the argument seems reductive in graphing Constance’s tale onto Amans’ moral journey). Though I do not see flattery as the central manifestation of deviant speech, I agree that deviant speech permeates private and public spheres and that it is intimately tied to a system of ethical degeneration.

people, as we see in the tales of Alphonse (Book 1) and Antiochus (Book 8), two royal riddle masters that stand like bookends, holding the *Confessio* between their narratives.

For all Gower's admiration for riddles and use of them in all three major texts in his corpus, they are rhetorically charged as threatening speech. After opening his *Confessio* with a Virgilian opening tempered with the modesty topos, Gower offers a Latin riddle:

Ossibus ergo carens que conterit ossa loquelis
Absit, et interpres stet procul oro malus.

Far hence the boneless one whose speech grinds bones,
Far hence be he who reads my verses ill.

This riddle on the tongue, that curious instrument that lacks bones yet grinds them, is presented as a defense mechanism. What is Gower afraid of? "Absit," cries a poet who seems threatened by his "malus" reader, much as this same author was threatened by the rebels of 1381. In the *Vox*, peasants that clearly lacked culture and status could nevertheless usurp power. They did so, not by grinding but by dissecting words. Grinding is a no less threatening tactic; it resembles the stone that crushed the Statue of Precious Metals to powder. It is the end of poetic alchemy, eroding Gower's efforts even as he embarks on his poetic project. Thus he protects himself with this riddle wrapped in the hortatory subjunctive. Diane Watt has written about the sexual connotations to Gower's riddle, and the blurring of sexual and authorial reproduction, but what seems more momentous is not the metaphor but the object under obfuscation: not merely the tongue, but the reader's tongue, which begs the question, what of Gower's riddling tongue? We saw it grind bones in the *Mirour* and the *Vox*. Yet this ruthless instrument of social satire will be made as vulnerable as a snail from its shell in the *Confessio*, which contains an estates satire, but also a lover's lament, a priest's counsel, and a goddess' laughter at a lover's hopes destroyed. Gower moves far from

his posture as archer and is willing to make himself Amans, the man hit by the arrow of unrequited love. Perhaps this mixture of greatness and humility explain the apologetic yet bombastic opening, in which the poet speaks in the “Engisti lingua,” or the tongue of Hengist. Gower is grinding bones in the very act of flourishing his modesty topos even as he emulates the *Aeneid*’s opening, but he is not ready to bring up Amans as the subject of his “Anglica metra.” The riddle, throughout the *Confessio*, is a vulnerable act, one way the boneless one has of building a phantom skeletal structure with mere words.

Many riddles emerge from the fear of being seen as less than one wishes to be. Riddles dress up the speaker, help him grind bones. The tyrants in the *Confessio* make use of its power. The final tale in Book 1, *The Tale of Three Questions*, is a story of such obsessive riddling. In Chapter One, I discussed Peronelle’s rhyme as a means to thwart Alphonse’s riddles, and in this chapter I focus on those riddles. Initially, “yong and wys” King Alphonse seems courtly, cultured, and completely at peace (1.3067). He passes the time exercising his mind with riddles and posing them to others at his court, who cannot equal their king’s subtle thinking. To Kurt Olsson, riddling is a game of leisure for the sophisticated men at Alphonse’s court.²⁷⁶ However, riddling is problematized in ways that suggest that the entire game not merely reveals Alphonse’s hubris, as Russell Peck has shown, but the perilous nature of the game itself.²⁷⁷ The riddle is a reality-shifting genre, an art in which the riddle master will *pike*, *sette*, *knet*, and *pronounce* in deceptive and delusive terms. The story is a warning against obsessive riddling as much as against pride.

The tension in the storyline emerges when Petro, a knight at the king’s court, answers Alphonse’s riddles easily. The king’s jealousy is aroused, for he “sette of his

²⁷⁶ Kurt Olsson, *John Gower and the Structures of Conversion* (Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 1992), 67.

²⁷⁷ Russell Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit in Gower’s Confessio Amantis* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 56-57.

wit gret pris” (3068). This use of “sette” soon morphs into the language of the zodiacal craftsman, for Alphonse closets himself until he can “sette som conclusion / Which scholde be confusion / Unto this knyht” (3085-7). Confusion and chaos, not ordered constellations, are the riddle master’s goal. The polysyllabic, Latinate rhyme underscores the search for obfuscating material (the rhymes are similar to the Latinate alchemical rhymes in Book 4 that I discussed in Chapter Four). To be certain of victory, the king comes up with three riddles; also to be safe, he orchestrates the riddle match to maximize the knight’s fear. The knight, who has always replied on the spot, is told to wait three days before his reply, and any error or anything not divulged “plein” will cost him his “goodes and his hede” (3110, 3116) This is what happens when *vertu*, *vis* of speech, is reinforced with the *vis* of “lawe” at the expense of goodness (3108).

The king’s moral blindness is made clear from the outset, for a Latin header provides the very riddle that the king needed to learn:

*Est virtus humilis, per quam deus altus ad yma
 Se tulit et nostre viscera carnis habet.
 Sic humilis superest, et amor sibi subditur omnis:
 Cuius habet nulla sorte superbus opem:
 Odit eum terra, celum deiecit et ipsum,
 Sedibus inferni statque receptus ibi.*

It is a humble power by which high God carried himself to the depths, and possessed the bowels of our flesh. Thus the humble is exalted, and love subdues all to itself, whose power the proud by no chance possesses. The earth hates the proud, even heaven itself expels him, and he remains in the regions of hell where he has been received.²⁷⁸

Perhaps this is not a riddle so much as divine mystery, but riddles have much in common with mystery. Here, the *virtus* is *humilis*, the virtue is humility, not power over men but for men. The proud, who live by *vis* alone, lack humility and, rejected by Nature and cast down from the heavens, lack a place in the physical universe,

²⁷⁸ Translation by Andrew Galloway, from Peck’s edition.

accepted only by Hell. Though language possesses a greater virtue than grass and stones, the virtue of the proud is odious to grass and stones: *Odit eum terra*. Earth and heaven are places of motion and places where even the Unmoved Mover moves, bearing himself and diving deep to the viscera of man and creation, fostering a chiasmic relationship of low things rising up and high things bending down. The proud are not flexible enough for such a world; their place is a stationary one with many thrones for those who would rule: *Sedibus inferni statque receptus*.

Ironically, the riddle master is inflexible about this one, all-important riddle of damning pride. How could Alphonse believe that killing his opponent would give him “hihe fame” (1.3088)? The tyrant riddle master is himself a riddle, a boneless crusher of bones, for he ensnares others with the words that name his own sin. It took Peronelle’s open declaration to divulge the message of that Latin subheader: *Terra, Humilis, Superba*. Those are the three answers to King Alphonse’s riddles, and also three major terms from the Latin sub-header. *Terra* is the important setting for man’s “vertu” be he humble or proud (Peronelle uses this exact word on line 3282 in recounting Mary’s virtue and Christ’s humility.) Lastly, Peronelle appeals to the king’s grace and justice to do what is right, so that “The world therof mai speke good” (3321). Appealing to Alphonse’s *vertu*, and having him bear in mind the lessons of humility and pride, she gives him an outlet from his original plan to take the knight’s “goodes” by doing what will truly give him “hihe fame” and the good words of reputation that he originally sought.

The story works because Peronelle brings Alphonse to earth and enlists him as her husband and peer. We never read about her feelings for him, only his, but that is because his heart, not hers, needs redemption. No longer setting “gret pris” on his own wisdom but rather sets “al his pris on hire,” he agrees to a marriage that

underscores his rejection of pride (3329). The riddle, once named, is conquered through her humility as much as his.

In *The Tale of Three Questions*, Gower's riddles have a pat, contained quality. What needs help least but is helped the most? Answer: Earth. What is worth most but costs least? Humility. What costs most but is of least value? Pride. Pared down like this, they are simple riddles with single-word answers. They structure the story, complement the Latin header, and imply something about the king's character; they are functional rather than fascinating. Moreover, the Latin gloss spoils the answer, as it does in the name game opening Gower's *Vox Clamantis*. The riddles, then, are an experience for the characters in the story, but the reader knows in advance which "Problemes and demandes" Alphonse will ask and what the answers are before they are even asked (1.3071).

Perhaps in part for these built-in spoilers, Gower is overlooked as a medieval maker and commenter on riddles, unlike a master like William Langland. Scholars still struggle to tease out meanings in his macaronic riddles, which can be studied in direct connection with the Latin riddle tradition enhanced with Langland's complex creativity. Andrew Galloway, for example, delves into Langland's challenging "half a laumpe lyne in latin," a notoriously difficult riddle troping on "The myddel of þe Moone"; in other part of his article he discusses the crux-laden line, "In þe corner of a cart-whel, with a crow croune" (B 13.151, 156; C 15.155).²⁷⁹ Galloway notes the Oxford riddling tradition that works from the graphic shapes of letters that can be concealed through metaphor (half a moon looks like the letter C), as well as the tradition of making riddles off the pieces of words. The "head" of crow, for example, is *cor*, which is Latin for heart (Langland does not gloss the answer, but he does nod in its direction through heavy wordplay within the passage: *corner*, *crow*, *croune*—thus

²⁷⁹ Andrew Galloway, "The Rhetoric of Riddling," 91-94.

cor.) That answer unveils Langland's social and clerical criticism. Riddles like these align Langland with a dense riddle tradition and set him up as the literary master of the genre.

Nevertheless, Gower makes a vital contribution to the literary riddle tradition. More than Chaucer, Langland, and the Gawain-poet, it is Gower who is invested in the connection between language and science, a preoccupation embraced by a small subculture of riddle enthusiasts. For example, Cambridge University, Gonville and Caius College, MS 230/116 includes riddles as well as "rhetorical, legal, astronomical, grammatical, and mathematical exercises and materials."²⁸⁰ In addition, Oxford: London, British Library, MS Sloane 513 also contains riddles and treatises on geomancy, astrology, and alchemy, which Andrew Galloway adds are "studies that were often discouraged in late-medieval universities."²⁸¹ Such book production suggests a link between linguistic puzzles and secrets locked in base metals and the arrangement of stars, corresponding to Gower's interest in *vertu* wherever it might be found. Gower's belief in alchemy as a high science is at odds with Chaucer's cynicism toward it in *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* as well as Dame Study's rebuke of astronomy and alchemy in the tenth Passus of *Piers Plowman*:

Ac Astronome is hard thyng, and yvel for to knowe;
Geometry and Geomesie is gynful of speche...
Yet art her fibicches in forceres of fele mennes makynge,
Experiments of Alkenamye the peple to deceyve;
If thow thynke to dowel, deel therwith nevere!
Alle thise sciences I myself sotileded and ordeynede,
And founded hem formest folk to deceyve" (B 10.209-10, 213-7).²⁸²

For Langland, as with Chaucer, a discussion of alchemy is a discussion of humanity more than science; it serves as a setting for deceit and theft, with an added layer of

²⁸⁰ Galloway, "The Rhetoric of Riddling," 70.

²⁸¹ Galloway, "The Rhetoric of Riddling," 82.

²⁸² William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Critical Edition of the B-Text Based on Trinity College Cambridge MS B.15.17*, edited by A. V. C. Schmidt (London: J. M. Dent, 1998).

Dame Study's deceit of humanity in the first place by ordaining and window-dressing this guileful practise as a test for humanity.²⁸³ Gower's perspective is quite different: words can deceive, but there is no "gynful" speech in nature or natural philosophy.

For Gower, then, the science of eloquence, including riddles, is tied to natural sciences for both good and ill, making Gower deeply admire rhetoric even while he expresses its capricious power. In his 1593 *Garden of Eloquence*, Peacham phrases enigma's attractions in terms that are strangely resonant with Gower's own short list of idealized pursuits:

Sometimes notwithstanding darknesse of speech causeth delectation, as that which is wittily invented, and aptly applyed, and so proportioned as that it may be understood of prompt wit and apt capacities, who are best able to find out the sense of a similitude, and to uncover the darke vaile of Ænigmatical speech. For indeede this figure is like a deepe mine, the obtaining of whose metall requireth deepe digging, or to a darke night, whose stars be hid with thicke cloudes.²⁸⁴

Precious metals, stars, enigma, delectation: these recall Gower's paeon to alchemy as a remarkable if inaccessible science, to the zodiac as the model of precise order, and to the "plesance" of words that accompany song. Gower's passion is rooted in proportion. Arion, alchemy, and astrology appeal for their "mesure," their perfected balance that makes everything else, including predators like Arion's lion and Peronelle's Alphonse, to stop and wonder. Riddles have that same potential for arresting patterns and veiled wisdom. Indeed, Cook points out that alchemical writings are known for wrapping their secrets in riddles.²⁸⁵

Riddles are in the toolbox of science. In the natural world humanity is confronted with alchemical and astrological mysteries, and though scholars like Eleanor Cook differentiate between the mystery and the riddle, Gower seems to treat them as cognate languages. Riddles are the mysteries of our own making, our way of

²⁸³ For a discussion of Langland's passage, see Bishop, *Words, Stones, & Herbs*, 104-109.

²⁸⁴ Quoted from Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles*, 56.

²⁸⁵ Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles*, 60.

participating in science, and conversely our way of translating science into poetry. Riddles obfuscate yet make us see. What John Maynard Keynes said of the scientist Newton applies to the pseudoscientist Gower:

Why do I call him a magician? Because he looked on the whole universe and all that is in it as a riddle, as a secret which could be read by applying pure thought to certain evidence, certain mystical clues which God had laid about the world . . . And he believed that by the same powers of his introspective imagination he would read the riddle of the Godhead, the riddle of past and future events divinely fore-ordained, the riddle of the elements . . .²⁸⁶

For Gower, the cosmic riddle is one that can be pieced apart and understood by its elements. Science demonstrates that transformation is a process engages with a body's parts, such as the astral connection between Taurus and Aries from Book 7's astronomical treatise, with bull becoming ram, or Book 4's transmutation of base metals into gold. Just so, Latin riddles and wordplay is a play of parts; John Ergome notes the play inherent in *taurum* and *aurum*, in that both words contain the word "aurum." Decapitate "taurum" and you get "aurum."²⁸⁷

According to Archer Taylor, these are "false" riddles. Eleanor Cook updates Taylor's assessment by explaining that such riddles are schematic: they depend upon the surface area of words as a place to play and twist meaning. A "real" riddle, which Cook calls an enigma, is one that works through metaphor. To trope on hidden likenesses is the allure of enigmas: once we catch the metaphor, the riddle lives on because the metaphor has changed our view of the object that was initially obscured.

Where does Gower belong among such categories? Certainly he is a schemer par excellence, treating even the heavens as a scheme of stars that meet as couplets. He is obsessed with the bits of words, their heads and feet and in-betweens. But schemes invested in the surface material of words gain metaphoric tissue: they acquire

²⁸⁶ Quoted from Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles*, 68.

²⁸⁷ Galloway, "The Rhetoric of Riddling," 78. Ergome's *taurum / aurum* commentary of John of Bridlington's *Vaticinium* is from Thomas Wright, *Political Poems and Songs*, Rolls Series (London: 1859), 1:127: "Si quis habet taurum, caput amputate, inde ut aurem."

hands and feet and tails; they decapitate and are decapitated. Thus the metaphors of the body in these scheme-riddles show the hidden likeness between words and the body. This initially may sound insignificant or just a verbal trick—who cares if words have heads and feet? However, the metaphor of the body in general and the metaphor of parentage in particular invoke the complex *vertu* of language. In these words depicted as bodies, we can see destructive powers that dismember those bodies or force them into unnatural acts of generation. When Gower takes on the trope of incest in Book 8, it is not an isolated enigma without bearing on the rest of the text, but one that Gower has treated already in his Anglo-Norman and Latin riddles and in his own Prologue in which sin is the “moder” of division. Gower’s *Tale of Apollonius* is the most complete exploration of metaphors, riddles, and incest themes, all of which explore how linguistic skill makes monsters and what these monsters have to say about the poetic process in all its possibilities and variation. Insightful essays speak provocatively of the “riddle of incest,” but less is said of the reverse, the incest of riddles. It is to this nexus of meanings that I now turn.

Generative Paradox: A Whole Company in One

Our discussion centers upon the riddle of Antiochus from Book 8 of the *Confessio*. In what is perhaps the most famous tale of the *Confessio*, for being the longest and the last as well as arguably the most sensational, Antiochus rapes his daughter and kills her suitors with words. Specifically, the suitors fail to solve a riddle and as agreed forfeit their lives. The genre blends a fairy tale princess-quest with the gritty waste surrounding the Sphinx, and the fascination of the tale lies in this underside of rape and riddled destruction, like Blue Beard’s horrors open for all to see but only viewed by the one with the key. Hints are there for all to see, however, such

as the men's heads resting on the city's spiked gates. Antioch the city complements Antiochus the man and his menacing riddle of incest and dismemberment. It is the opposite of the Rebellion of 1381 as discussed in Chapter Two, in that the king, not the rebels, decapitates men at court, but the hint of the *Vox*'s syllabic play is here. The suitors' heads are cropped for a failure in piecing together Antiochus' linguistic puzzle; failing to comprehend his life, they lose theirs.

Drawing off Archer Taylor's scholarship, Eleanor Cook calls Antiochus' riddle a neck-riddle, which is a riddle with a life at stake (Taylor's originally defined the neck-riddle as one whose solution destroyed the riddler, but Cook expands this to a risk taken by either riddler and riddlee). Often classified as false riddles, neck riddles depend upon private knowledge rather than a common stock of lore that untangle the riddle's knots. Obviously, when one's life is at stake, one is less particular. The experience rings true with Tolkien's hobbit, Bilbo, who asks riddles in a dark cave knowing if he loses the contest with Gollum he will be eaten. He touches his pocket, musing, "What have I got in my pocket?" and, when Gollum perceives it as an unfair riddle (how could the sharpest riddle master possibly know the answer to such a question?), Bilbo fudges his way through the contest.²⁸⁸

Besides being a more self-conscious, more calculating riddle master than Bilbo Baggins, Antiochus is also a king, and his riddle contest occurs not in a cave, privately, but at his court, publically. The reader of the tale knows Antiochus' crime, but only when the hero Apollonius arrives do we learn the riddle that killed so many men and perceive its autobiographical statement:

With felonie I am upbore,
I ete and have it noght forbore
Mi modres fleissh, whos housebonde
Mi fader for to seche I fonde,
Which is the sone ek of my wif.

²⁸⁸ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1966), 73.

Hierof I am inquisitif;
And who that can mi tale save,
Al quyt he schal my doghter have;
Of his ansuere and if he faile,
He schal be ded withoute faile. (8.405-414)

The private knowledge, of course, is Antiochus' incestuous relationship with his daughter. He is inquisitive not merely in the sense of asking his listener a question (the mocking question being, "Am I getting away with this?"), but inquisitive as to the boundaries of his riddled familial relationships. He invites the listener to "mi tale save" or explain his riddle, but the verb "save" is also a challenge for a would-be savior who would turn this diseased discourse into healing. It is an act of salvation that Apollonius cannot perform. To *saven speche* is to withhold speech, and that silence is the prince's response to the horrible tale now in his unwilling possession. That Antiochus hides his incest only to declare it in his riddle is risky, yet the riddle itself breeds familiarity between riddler and riddlee. Surrounded by the incestuous assortment of mothers and fathers, daughters and sons that are all his or represent him, Antiochus expands his perverse family by proposing that the one outside his kin, the one who can "mi tale save," and hold it within himself, can also hold his deflowered daughter. Apollonius would be both son-in-law and father-in-law of the man who raped his daughter. The fantasy revealed in Antiochus' riddle is a family perversely intact and centered on him.

The choice of riddle is interesting in light of the princess' private words to her nurse after the rape:

Helas, mi soster, waileway,
That evere I sih this ilke day!
Thing which mi bodi ferst begat
Into this world, onliche that
Mi worldes worschipe hath bereft." (8.327-331)

In a sense, Antiochus' riddle poaches on his daughter's circumlocution, spoken in private, and transforms it into a dense riddle, spoken in public. Like Tereus, who rips

out Philomela's tongue, this verbal appropriation is one last way of robbing his daughter, for he has her already trapped in his "plesance," a word which recalls verbal *vertu* gone awry in Book 7, and is here used to convey the father's sexual satisfaction, in which predatory, physical "plesance" turns verbal in the act of a riddle (343). Echoing the "pleasance" of rhetoric noted previously, the word signals the father's enjoyment of incest as a sexual pun. Incestuous "plesance" is likewise seen in Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme*, in which Satan and his daughter Sin enjoy "pleasant desport" between father and daughter (MO 219). In the *Confessio*, Antiochus' riddle commemorates his pleasure, and, as something for her to listen to time after time as the suitors are called upon, it is a disgusting display of his dominance, his voice and her silence.²⁸⁹ Implicitly she must *saven speche*, holding in all, voiceless for the remainder of the tale and of her life.

For the suitors, it is a devastatingly difficult riddle, though it would be easily answered if the men had access to Antiochus' experience, rather than have to depend upon common lore available to anyone.²⁹⁰ It could be argued that the suitors had a decent shot at answering the riddle. The generative paradox trope, so central to Antiochus' words, is a textbook riddle since Donatus:

Aenigma est obscura sententia per occultam similitudinem rerum, ut Mater me genuit, eadem mox gignitur ex me cum significet aquam in glaciem concrecere et ex eadem rursus effluere

Enigma is a statement that is obscure because of some hidden likeness of things, for example, "My mother bore me, and soon was born of me," which means water solidifies into ice, and then flows back out of it.²⁹¹

²⁸⁹ The daughter has no verbal outlet and no opportunity to inform a suitor without horrifying him and declaring her guilt. Contrast her case with that of Portia of *The Merchant of Venice*, who can tip her suitor into guessing the riddle's answer with rhyme: "Tell me where is Fancy bred, / Or in the heart or in the head? / How begot, how nourished?" Debra Fried completes the rhyme: "Get the message? – chose the lead." Fried, "Rhyme Puns," 84.

²⁹⁰ Samson's riddle in Judges 14 is a similar riddle: "Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet." His audience cannot reason out the answer without Delilah's help. Samson's riddle at a wedding is a fitting analogue to Antiochus' riddle, designed to stave off a wedding.

²⁹¹ Quoted in Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles*, 32.

The answer, ice, neatly answers the disturbing ambiguity of mother-child incest. Incest is a standard metaphor to conceal the simple truth. The riddler's trick is that ice and water seem to relate to one another as human family members; the riddlee must extract the metaphor by pondering the meaning without getting distracted by the trope of incest. Donatus' riddle inaugurated a long tradition of riddles operating on generative paradox. These included riddles that tested one's knowledge of Scripture (e.g., "quis fuerit natus ante patrem et genitus ante matrem . . ." [who was born before father and mother]; the answer is Abel, because Adam and Eve were never born).²⁹²

Antiochus' riddle seems to work in the generative paradox tradition, but there is no trick to undo the seeming paradox, for the metaphor of generative paradox is no metaphor. The suitors may have lost their lives because the answer was too easy, not too difficult. On a deeper level, Larry Scanlon deems this riddle irresolvable grammatically—"There is simply no "I" that can fill all the slots the riddle requires." Scanlon observes that the riddle works through rupturing the stability of the family until

all generational distinctions collapse. By effectively becoming his daughter's husband, he also becomes his own father, because the law which separated him from his father has lost its force. . . . Why should a father's incestuous desire for his daughter also be a quest for his own father? And why should the object of this quest be imagined not only as the father but the husband of the mother? It is impossible to answer these questions without assigning to this riddle an understanding of psychoanalysis. Regressively fulfilling his desire for his mother with his daughter, the incestuous father is also still seeking to displace his own father. Moreover, given the riddle's insistence on the purely discursive status of familial categories, we might make the anticipation of psychoanalysis even more precise. What the incestuous father of this riddle seeks is the Name of the Father.²⁹³

²⁹² Galloway, "Rhetoric of Riddling," 74.

²⁹³ Larry Scanlon, "The Riddle of Incest: John Gower and the Problem of Medieval Sexuality," in *Re-Visioning Gower*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Ashville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1998), 125.

Scanlon does not solve the riddle so much as reveal a darker riddle hidden in between the lines, which is what a good Sphinxine riddle should do. The most satisfying riddles are the ones that live on even after they are answered, as Pagin puts it:

While a riddle that has been solved ceases to be a riddle for the solver, it does continue to exist for him as another kind of poem. In fact, many riddles, especially founded on paradoxical metaphors, become impressive poems when solved for the very reason that their metaphoric texture is now revealed.²⁹⁴

For Scanlon, the answer, “incest,” is not an end in itself but a new beginning to the riddle, as a hidden statement for Antiochus’ desire for his mother and a desire to replace his father, and to that extent his efforts follow the spirit of Pagis’ words of the complex nature of riddles. Personally, I do not see how the text supports Scanlon’s assertion of Antiochus’ Oedipal desire for his mother and desire to kill his father, and I think this very quest of a back-story that Scanlon embarks on takes him through a false leads surrounding people who do not exist. Antiochus uses familial relationships in seemingly prolific ways—referring to father, mother, son, husband, wife, daughter—leading his listener to think of many people, when really the riddle is solipsistically centered on himself. He is the father he refers to, the husband of the mother, and the one he seeks out. The very intercourse with his daughter is a search for his own act of engendering her and devouring of what belongs to him. The riddle says less about his daughter and more about himself—the father, husband, son. The human bonds that proliferate in the riddle narrow to signify his mastery over all these bonds; he devours all.

Antiochus’ generative paradox is game of arithmetic. He creates a profusion of familial ties—a parody of procreation and the growth of a nuclear family, though ultimately he is talking only about his daughter and himself. Scanlon notes the confusion over seeking one’s father and one’s mother, but in 1955 P. Goolden noted

²⁹⁴ Quoted in Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles*, 28.

that the riddle was neatly solved if in-laws were taken into account.²⁹⁵ He is her father-in-law as well as her father; she is his daughter and his mother-in-law. Antiochus is like a dramatist filling the stage with a full cast, but he and his daughter are playing all the roles.

This false expansiveness belied by a fixation on the self is reinforced by Antiochus' mode of delivery. There is a rounded quality to the rhyme; its phonemic echoes at first seem suggestive but ultimately are constrictive, even strangling. The initial rhyme "upbore / forbore," which makes the reader repeat the word "bore," encapsulates the generative paradox at play, with a semantic and stylistic tension around forbearing one's forebears. It also contains the echo of the daughter's lost chastity: "sche hath forlore / The flour which sche hath longe bore" (8.303-4). This initial echo play is reinstated with a vengeance in the *rime riche* couplet on "faile," hinging on grammatical play: "Of his ansuere and if he faile, / He schal be ded withoute faile" (413-4). The word spoken twice has a flat finality to it, a sudden end to the proliferation of bearing young and burgeoning curiosity—*inquisitif*-ness—of what all these carnal mixtures amount to. Just so the riddle, at first opening up with semantic puns, folds into itself and falls on the same word. Rhyme serves as the analogy of collapsing all people into one, ending with the mythological serpent (not unlike Aspidis) devouring its tail, or in this instant, in the riddler in devouring the riddlee, word consuming word.

What I see here, in contrast to Scanlon, Donavin, and others, is not Antiochus reaching out for his past but rather his parody of procreation that allows him a role in the life (and death) of all whose lives touch his own. He is a Sphinx at the crossroads, meeting and devouring all. The real, natural father is subsumed in the equation. In the

²⁹⁵ Goolden, P. "Antiochus's Riddle in Gower and Shakespeare," *Review of English Studies* 6 (21), 1955, 245–51, 245.

fourteenth century, as proper names were becoming more common and the male surname became hereditary, the names of family members themselves were linked in a string of *rime riche*. There is something of that going on here, with Antiochus claiming all these names, all these male roles, for himself alone, and all the female names for his daughter—the great irony is that in allocating all these names to her, the nameless daughter loses her identity; she is a cipher acted upon, never acting. The list of people referred to evokes a room full of family, a pretense which underscores the emptiness of the father-daughter relationship.

Scanlon already noted the link between sexuality and mathematics established since Creation:

The myhti god, which unbegunne
 Stant of himself and hath begunne
 Alle othre thinges at his wille . . . [created Adam and Eve and]
 . . . bad hem crease and multiplie.
 For of the mannes Progenie,
 Which of the womman schal be bore,
 The nombre of Angles which was lore . . . (8.1-2, 29-32)

Though God is fully centered in the sense that He is first and Prime Mover, who “Stant of himself,” meaning both self-sufficient but also standing by himself, the rhyme word “unbegunne” sheds its prefix in an act of creative energy, giving a beginning to all else. The rounded, shared sound, *begunne*, signifies fecundity, not Antiochus’ false productivity. That productivity is further enacted in the growth of the human race, though part of a larger equation: multiplication is a product of the division of the angels in their war against God. The *bore / lore* rhyme underscores this tension between fruitful humanity and fallen angels, or punning on sacred lore and angelic loss.

The passage on God’s Creation is not a riddle, of course, but a sacred mystery, but both play a game of arithmetic and hunt the equation of origins. The riddle’s convoluted form comprises an arithmetic that unlocks its secret lore. This is true of

much generative paradox. Here, for example, is a riddle: two fathers are standing with their two sons. How many men are standing there? Answer: only three men, because one of the two men is the father of the other man; the numbers collapse when they are grandfather, son, and grandson.²⁹⁶ Antiochus is doing this very thing, making more people seem to stand on the platform of his riddle. He breeds phantom people in order to slay real ones.

The choice of riddle is disconcerting. Unlike Alphonse, whose riddles unwittingly reflect his own flaws, Antiochus advertises the rape with his riddle. His brazen self-absorption is absolute, and he believes that no one can name his secret except a daughter, who, unable to name her father's deed, can only speak in circumlocutions to her nurse of the "Thing," her father's genitals, which created and destroyed her (8.329). The riddle is narcissism: a sphinxine compulsion to devour and continue devouring by destruction, rape or death, which in turn creates more phantom people to exist in the context of a riddle alone. It is Antiochus' obsessive word play that turns living bodies into graphic word games.

This narcissism both ends and curiously lives on when Gower's Apollonius becomes involved. Interpretations of his incestuous culpability vary wildly. Interestingly, no one I have read has a problem with his quest in the first place. It seems reckless to abandon one's people to engage in a perilous riddle contest far away, all to bring back fame for his wisdom and a female prize. That the contest is rigged only underscores the naïveté of the young ruler: the dangers of the contest are not in successfully unlocking the riddle but holding its diseased content within ("mi tale save," Antiochus orders). Once the riddle has been cracked, the quest is abandoned. The secret unveiled does not save the suffering daughter but condemns

²⁹⁶ *Amorous Games: A Critical Edition of Les Adevineaux Amoureux*, edited by James Woodrow Hassell, Jr. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1974), no. 574, discussed and translated on page xxxv.

her, unwanted by the young riddle master; Apollonius leaves her to her fate and flees to save himself. He returns to Tyre only to leave again, this time in fear of phantom people, suspected assassins without and within: it is as though Antiochus' riddle of phantom people has opened the possibility of henchmen encroaching on Apollonius.

He flees, to the devastation of his people. Turning our point of view sharply from Apollonius and his victimization by Antiochus, Gower dips into the feelings of Apollonius' people victimized by their prince's actions.

Our prince, oure heved, our govenrnour,
Thurgh whom we stoden in honour,
Withoute the comun assent
Thus sodeinliche is fro our went! (8.491-4)

Antioch is a city whose gates are topped with decapitated heads, and in essence Apollonius has also lost his head, as his people expressly lament. The prince is as wild and homeless as Nebuchadnezzar, perhaps not as culpable (he did not boast against God), but he is somewhere in between Alphonse and Antiochus in his obsession with riddles. In seeking self-aggrandizement in a riddle-contest, he suffers the consequences and walks under a riddle that follows him like the moon.

The consequence, as it was for Alphonse and Antiochus, is to take on the riddle, to become a riddle and have it apply to himself. A riddle's staying power is as great as Richard Wilbur's letter *x*:

The letter X will never disappear.
The more you cross it out, the more it's here.²⁹⁷

Answering a riddle does not make it go away. To crack Antiochus' code is not to receive acknowledgement for his knowledge as riddle master but rather to gain a new burden of knowledge, as Oedipus learned only too well. He solved the Sphinx's riddle only to become a riddle:

²⁹⁷ Wilbur, *Collected Poems*, from *The Disappearing Alphabet*, 571.

Resolving an enigma means shifting it to a higher level, as the first drops away. Oedipus was drawn to the Sphinx, and he resolved the Sphinx's enigma, but only to become an enigma himself. Thus anthropologists were drawn to Oedipus, and are still there measuring themselves against him, wondering about him.²⁹⁸

The inheritance Apollonius receives from his riddle master father, Antiochus, suggests that this is the father-son relationship that matters most in the tale. It explains why the tale goes on after Antiochus dies, for the riddle lives on in Antiochus' son. The father-son diction occurs immediately after Antiochus tells his riddle:

“Forthi my sone,” quod the king,
“Be wel avised of this thing,
Which hath thi lif in jeupartie.” (8.415-7)

This “thing,” this riddle, links the prince's vulnerability with that of the princess, who lamented the “Thing which mi bodi ferst begat” (329). Antiochus presses his rhetorical and sexual presence on both daughter and “sone” Apollonius, and both bear the weight of this oppressive father-figure.

Out of the 462 instances of the word “sone” in the poem (which includes other meanings such as “immediately” and “sun”), an overwhelming number of the instances in which the filial sense is meant are found in direct address from Genius to Amans. Here is one example of many:

Forthi, mi sone, if thou wolt live
In vertu, thou most vice eschuie (1.2254-5)

Here is the same construction with the same relationship of councilor to counseled, and a similar sense of peril—moral peril for Amans, mortal peril for Apollonius. The similarity in address chips away at the argument that the *Confessio* is a *Bildungsroman* in which Genius erroneously starts out accepting incest but increasingly condemns it in all its forms.²⁹⁹ Even at the end of the *Confessio*, language is proven a difficult

²⁹⁸ Roberto Calasso, *The Marriage of Cadmus and Harmony* (New York: Knopf, 1993), 343-4; quoted in Cook, *Enigmas and Riddles*, 28.

²⁹⁹ In *Incest Narratives and the Structure of Gower's Confessio Amantis*, Georgiana Donavin charts a character development from myopic priest of Venus to a “true” priest. I disagree with this plot and character portrayal, especially the claim that Genius was wrong to excuse Canacee and Machaire but,

medium of moral instruction because of the ambiguous ties by which it binds people together. Riddles are a speech experience and an engagement for two, riddler and riddlee, and it proves an intimate, if potentially mortal, connection. Father-son relations and a riddle's transference from Antiochus to Apollonius suggestively bring Genius and Amans into the riddle's text, which ultimately is Genius' text (he is the actor behind Antiochus).

This connection also creates confusion over the story's abruptly shifting points of view. Scanlon writes that the story is from Antiochus' perspective until the rape, after which there is intense focalization not on Antiochus but on his daughter, and that Antiochus becomes "a cipher, an agent of mere blind violence."³⁰⁰ Scanlon's point is that Antiochus is reduced by his act and a better character (the victim) is allowed to show her point of view. The term, "cipher" is interesting because Antiochus' riddle is precisely a play with arithmetic by which he multiplies himself. His blind violence is invested with perceptive language; he speaks words that make men blind. In this game of arithmetic, Antiochus subtracts would-be suitors and adds to his family by becoming a father to Apollonius. His point of view dominates even when—especially when?—he is a cipher, because his riddle is the *X* that cannot be crossed out. The princess, despite her moment of focalization, is relegated to the background until her death. In her book, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination*, Elizabeth Archibald has demonstrated that this shift in perspectives is by no means unique to Gower in retelling this tale. The first chapter of the *Historia Apollonii*, a Latin text named in eighth-century library catalogues, narrates exactly that shift in focalization from the

after Genius speaks of Venus and Antiochus, he learns his lesson that incest is always bad. This outlook reduces the *Confessio* to a series of black and white exempla at Canacee and Machaire's expense. I see "Canacee and Machaire" as a fairy tale that changes how we view and judge things, in this case, incest, which is overshadowed by a murderous jailor of a father, who writes his own riddle and entraps others into his obsessive text.

³⁰⁰ Scanlon, "The Riddle of Incest," 118.

lustful father to the grief-stricken daughter.³⁰¹ Focalization is not Gower's literary invention, but it does show what Gower finds significant in his readings. So, too, with the Apollonius tradition of a familial, linguistic theme, which Gower expands upon in the tale and in his wider corpus of poetry. By investing Antiochus with his own mode of speech, Genius further complicates the focalization taking place and performs an odd act of perspective that suggests the constant negotiation between rhetoric's age-old *vertu* for good or for evil.

Conceiving the Riddle: Gender and Incest in the *Mirour de l'Omme*

This was not Gower's first instance of father-daughter incest, nor was it his first riddle of generative paradox. Though his Anglo-Norman poem, the *Mirour de l'Omme* is read only by Gower specialists, Gower's work touches on Milton's epic in ways that demonstrate the complexity of Gower's outlook on incest and riddles not merely as reprehensible but a part of humanity's literary and even spiritual inheritance.

Readers of Milton's *Paradise Lost* are familiar with Satan's incest with his daughter Sin, who sprang from Satan's head fully grown much like Zeus' Athene and in time bore him a son, Death, who raped her and spawned the canine offspring that forever gird her hips and gnaw her womb. Maureen Quilligan has provocatively compared Milton's allegorical incest narrative with Gower's *Tale of Apollonius*, in which Antiochus rapes his daughter and conceals his incest in a riddle, declaring that he is the eater of his mother's flesh.³⁰² Sphinxlike, he then poses the riddle to his daughters' suitors and executes the young men who fail to solve it. In both texts, a

³⁰¹ Elizabeth Archibald, *Incest and the Medieval Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 95-97.

³⁰² Maureen Quilligan, *Incest and Agency in Elizabeth's England* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005). See also Minaz Jooma, "The Alimentary Structures of Incest in *Paradise Lost*," *ELH* 63.1 (1996), 25-43.

ruler shows a lack of self control, a daughter is devoured, and incest, in the words of Elizabeth Allen, “becomes a peculiarly monarchical failure of community, an expression of the extreme isolation of one ungoverned patriarchal will.”³⁰³ So ungoverned is Milton’s Satan, that he begets a daughter without meaning to. C.S. Lewis commented that “It is by his own will that [Satan] revolts, but not by his own will that Revolt itself tears its way in agony out of his head and becomes a being separable from himself, capable of enchanting him (II, 749-66) and bearing him unexpected and unwelcome progeny.”³⁰⁴ Indeed, when he meets his offspring at the gates of Hell, Satan calls his son “execrable” and tells his daughter,

I know thee not, nor ever saw till now
Sight more detestable than him and thee. (744-5)³⁰⁵

In marked contrast to his Miltonic descendent, Gower’s Satan *does* understand where Sin comes from, and who models family planning of the most incestuous sort. In spite of the close parallels noted by Yeager and other medievalists, John Gower’s *Mirour de l’Omme* has been considered an unlikely source for Milton on account of its language, Anglo-Norman, and its survival in only one manuscript; in 1906, J. S. P. Tatlock remarked that “the chance is infinitesimal that Milton ever heard of the poem.”³⁰⁶ Milton scholars today seem similarly dismissive or unaware of Gower’s text, as an unlikely source similar in improbability to Serafino della Salandra’s 1647 *Adamo caduto*.³⁰⁷ It is too bad Miltonists are not exploring the *Mirour*: Quilligan discusses

³⁰³ Elizabeth Allen, “Newfangled Readers in Gower’s ‘Apollonius of Tyre’”, *SAC* 29, 2007, 431.

³⁰⁴ C. S. Lewis, *A Preface to Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961), 99.

³⁰⁵ John Milton, *Paradise Lost* in *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (New York: Macmillan, 1957).

³⁰⁶ R. F. Yeager, “John Gower’s French,” Siân Echard, *A Companion to Gower*, 137-8; for Tatlock, see Robert B. White, “Milton’s Allegory of Sin and Death: A Comment on Backgrounds,” *Modern Philology* Vol. 70 No. 4 (May 1973), 337.

³⁰⁷ See Hughes, 175, 250 n. 752. Salandra’s *Adamo caduto* is discussed enthusiastically by Norman Douglas, *Old Calabria* (Evanston, Ill. : Marlboro Press/Northwestern, 1996 [orig. 1915]). Portions of Salandra and other texts of the Fall can be read in translation in Watson Kirkconnell, *The Celestial Cycle: the Theme of Paradise Lost in World Literature with Translations of the Major Analogues* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1952).

the Apollonius story in the *Confessio* in relation to Milton's text, but not the analogue in the *Mirour*; Minaz Jooma's essay on alimentary structures in *Paradise Lost* would be richer by including lactation in the *Mirour*, a topic that I hope to expand on here. Gower's version of Satan and Sin's incest not only anticipates Milton but intriguingly reverses the lesson learned. While Milton's Satan, through his fall, learns the consequences of his rebellion and meets them, without recognition, as his own progeny, Gower's Satan teaches God a lesson in the power of endogamy. Far from not recognizing his own children and despising them, Gower's Satan is a hermaphroditic parent who nurtures his offspring with maternal care and instructs Sin and Death to engender the Seven Deadly Sins, who have their own offspring with the World. Though Gower vilifies incest and hermaphrodites, he also has God copy Satan's strategy, by breeding his allegorical female Virtues with Reason, and finally by his own incest with his daughter, Mary. If Milton did know—even develop his work from—Gower's account, he took pains to define a more primary role for God's originality than did Gower: and Gower's location of God as an *imitator* is a sign of the reversibility of original and imitation in language itself that Gower demonstrates throughout the *Mirour*, and indeed throughout his poetry.

In Gower's poetry, incest and riddles are linked mysteries. In the *Tale of Apollonius*, Antiochus voices his incest in a riddle, while in the opening lines of the *Mirour*, Gower tells a riddle before allegorizing it as incest. He coyly tells his readers, "I want ... to tell you a little about nothing," [Un poy du nient je vuill conter] before launching into the near 30,000 lines that follow as a vast gloss on the following riddle (34):

Tout estoit nient, quanq' om ore tient
 Et tout ce nient en nient revient
 Par nient, qui tout fait anientir:
 C'est nient q'en soy tous mals contient
 Du quoy tout temps quant me sovient,

M'estoet a trere maint suspir,
Que je voi tantz mals avenir
Du nient, car tous ont leur desir
En nient q'au siecle se partient;
Que nient les fait leur dieu guerpier
Pour nient, q'en nient doit revertir
Et devenir plus vil que fient. (37-47)

All was nothing, however much man now has, and all this nothing returns to nothing through nothing, which causes everything to be annihilated: it is nothing that in itself contains all evils; whenever I recall it, I have to heave many a sigh, because I see so many evils come forth from nothing, for all have their desire in the nothing that belongs to the world; that nothing makes them desert their God for a nothing that must revert to nothing and become more vile than dung.

Through repetition of the word “nient” eight times in twelve lines, Gower impresses on us the weight of this seemingly weightless word. How to quantify nothing, how to measure its size and strength, how to mark its origin, are the underlying questions Gower poses through his riddled language. The internal rhyme *nient / tient* begs the question of how one holds onto nothing, which is to underscore the illogical reality of sin. Even though Gower proposes a formula in which nothing sits on both sides of the equation, nothing equaling nothing, that same nonentity is heavily processed, in returning and containing and belonging and recalling, that there seems to be something to it indeed, something physically and linguistically transformative that makes Gower's breathing and his lines labored.

Gower's puffing breath (*M'estoet a trere maint suspir*) is something that we will see again in Book 1 of the *Vox Clamantis* (42). In all his poetry he reacts physically—histrionically, even—to a topsy-turvy world, but *suspir* is an appropriate response in its blend of physical labor and onomatopoeia: what could approximate nothing better than an invisible, weightless, and formless breath? Even as Gower resists nothing, he conforms to it and is burdened by its invisible menace. It is a parody of being and of God's handiwork. Gower cites John:

. . . au commencement
Dieux crea toute chose et fist,
Mais nient fuist fait sanz luy (51-3)

. . . in the beginning God created and made everything and that nothing was made without Him.

As some theologians before him, Gower takes Scripture literally: nothing was *made*, but not by God. Nothing is a something, except that it does not merit such status. By investing a paradoxical presence to absence, nothing becomes a force with an origin. In the second stanza, Gregory's divine breath (*divin inspirement*) helps counter nothing precisely by confining it. Gregory's breath, originated from God's breathing into Gregory and spoken to our benefit, encircles the word nothing and explicates it for humanity's empowerment:

Du nient la forma nous [Gregoire] aprist,
Disant que nient en soy comprend
Le noun du pecché soulement,
Car pecché tous biens anientist. (37-60)

(Gregory) taught us the form of nothing, saying that nothingness contains in itself only the name of sin, for sin annihilates everything good.

The form of nothing is the form of sin. That nothing has a name, sin, again speaks of its status as something, yet it is not permitted to have that status. Gower both publicizes the name of nothing with excessive repetition while gesturing at its repression—a gesture only, for in this world nothing is everything and everywhere.

Thus riddles are rooted in theology and cosmology— nothing is a primal substance not made by God, and yet still there. Engaging in this riddle is something that we then partake of in ourselves. The header to this riddle helps us decode the nothing that concerns Gower as Sin's false fecundity: “pecché anientist” or makes nothing of creatures. Nothing becomes personified in Sin, and the generative paradox of incest becomes the riddled process by which nothing proliferates, specifically when Satan engenders Sin with nothing as his sexual partner:

Ly deable, qui tous mals soubtile
 Et trestous biens hiet et revile,
 De sa malice concevoit
 Et puis enfantoit une file,
 Q'ert tresmalvoise, laide et vile,
 La quelle Pecché noun avoit.
 Il mesmes sa norrice estoit,
 Et la gardoit et doctrinoit
 De sa plus tricherouse guile;
 Par quoy la file en son endroit
 Si violente devenoit,
 Que riens ne touche que n'avile. (205-16)

The devil, who contrives all evils and who hates and reviles all good, in his malice conceived and gave birth to a daughter, who was very evil, ugly, and vile, who had the name of Sin. He himself was her nurse, looked after her and indoctrinated her in his most treacherous guile, whereby the girl in turn became so fierce that she touched nothing without vilifying it.

Just as nothing results in something more vile than dung, so Gower presents Satan as a parody of parenthood, for his baby is “laide et vile,” nursed on milk spiked with guile. Despite Gower’s scorn, however, one can’t help but notice the intimacy between Creation’s first parent and child. Unlike Milton’s Satan, whose daughter springs from his head readymade, Gower’s Satan “concevoit” and “enfantoit,” conceives and gives birth to her. These verbs encapsulate a mother’s birth process and the ensuing work of satisfying an infant’s basic needs. Hence, the incestuous process of nothing has changed Satan’s gender as he takes on the feminine role of mother and “norrice,” or nurse, and who “gardoit,” or watches over the helpless infant.

Linguistic and physical transgendered acts were lamented by Alan of Lille, whose *De Planctu Naturae* marks society’s sexually degenerative times by grammatical inversions of gender in which “he’s” turn into “she’s,” and passivity is understood in grammatical and sexual terms as a perversion that unmans man. While Alan is condemning sodomy, Gower seems to vilify motherhood. It is a strategy that he employs in the poem’s first lines, when he tells every lover [“chascun amant”] that makes up his audience, “Leave the mother with her children” [“Lessetz la Miere ove

tout s'enfant"] (3). It is an odd commandment, and difficult to know whether this mother is sin with a capital *S*, or Venus, or simply one of the compromised women whose illegitimate children were engendered by the "chascun amant" whom Gower addresses. Thus, until Gower elaborates on his allegory of Sin later on, the reader is in the uncomfortable position of vilifying women and children.

By contrast, Satan is an enthusiastic parent. In Milton, this is for narcissistic reasons: one recalls Sin's words to her father that she lured him not for her beauty as such but for mirroring his beauty back to him: "full oft / Thyself in me thy perfect image viewing" (2.764). Using a line with a rare feminine ending, Milton presents Sin as an enchanted mirror in which Satan can view himself in feminine form. It is noteworthy that in Gower, Satan's narcissism extends to female and male offspring. Death, so "odious" and utterly apart in Milton's text, is described along with Gower's Sin as "very dear" [molt cheris] to their father and having "resembled him very closely" (PL 2.781; MO 229-31). The difference seems to be that in Milton the act of incest creates monstrosity, but in Gower it clones, and once Sin and Death are born, they too can incestuously clone their own likenesses. Thus Satan encourages Death and Sin to have children together. Sin happily complies:

Pour plus avoir de ses norris,
La miere espousa son enfant:
Si vont sept files engendreant
Qui sont d'enfern enheritant (233-6)

[I]n order to have more offspring, the mother espoused her child: they engendered seven daughters, who are heirs of hell

Crucially, Sin is not raped by her son but shows agency in espousing him, taking her cue from her father who did the same with her. She is not a victim but a woman with a voice honored by Satan, who knows Sin and Death's "enhort" or persuasion would be essential in corrupting humanity. They are his advisors: "Par ceaux toutdis se conseila" [with them he always took counsel] (224, 277).

Satan shows his respect privately and publically. As Matthew Giancarlo notes in his *Parliament and Literature in Medieval England*, in the parliament scene Sin uses legalistic terms that show both Gower's familiarity with parliamentary proceedings as well as point to the irony that the "Commons" acting in the Parliament are in fact the baronage.³⁰⁸ What I find interesting, though, is that this baronage is a *family*. Satan holds parliament not with a Miltonic host of devils but with his own offspring, his "amy" as he calls them, and Sin is honored as the first to arrive and the first to give counsel (362). In this parliament, in which the fallen angels are assumed by some scholars to be present though the devils never speak nor are described, the parliament turns out to be a family meeting. Satan turns not to Belial or Mammon but to the "norris," the nurselings, for aid (233). These "norris," the Seven Deadly Sins, are not the barking spawn of Milton's text but children who inherit their parent's likeness and family mission, as they incestuously espouse the World and give birth to five daughters apiece.

In *Amoral Gower*, Diane Watt notes the linguistic aspects to shifts in gender among Sin, Death, and their children. She points out that Pecché (or Sin) is a masculine noun, while Mort (or Death) is feminine, yet Gower casts Death as masculine and Sin as female (it is the same in Milton and Salandra's *Adamo Caduto*, in part because the allegory would come undone if Satan fell in love with his daughter Death, Death being a consequence not a precursor of Sin, nor would Death's womb be live-giving).³⁰⁹ Watt does not discuss Satan's feminine side, but it complements her discussion of Sin because a feminine father engendering a masculine daughter and feminine son reveal a family tradition of gender inversion, which Gower makes

³⁰⁸ Matthew Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 105-12, esp. 108.

³⁰⁹ Watt, *Amoral Gower*, 27.

explicit only in discussing the third generation. Sin and Death's daughters, he explains, are not daughters:

Entendre devetz tout avant,
Tous ceux don't vous irray contant,
Comme puis orretz l'estoire dite,
Naiscont du merveillous semblant;
Car de nature a leur naiscant
Trestous sont mostre hermafodrite:
Sicome le livre m'en recite,
Ce sont quant double forme habite
Femelle et madle en un enfant:
Si noun de femme les endite,
Les filles dont je vous endite
Sont auci homme nepourquant. (1021-1032)

You should understand in advance that all these things I am going to tell you about, as later you will hear the story told, were born with strange appearance, for at birth by nature all were hermaphroditic monsters. As the book tells me, these are when a double form, female and male, lives in a child. If I lay on them the names of female, the daughters of whom I am telling you are nonetheless also males.

Watt aptly points out that the reference to a textual source is a “smoke screen,” and in fact Gower's own text abounds with gendered and lexical play. Confronted head-on in this stanza, the words have the same flavor of generative paradox as they do in the initial riddle on nothing, and Gower seems to feel the need to explain and re-explain doubled gender by his double rhyme: “endite,” on line 1030, incestuously rhymes with itself in the next line and says largely the same thing—“the name of women, the daughters of whom I speak”—before Gower breaks out of the *rime riche* loop and tells us that these women are also men.³¹⁰

Such gendered, linguistic play is lived out in the allegory, for these hermaphrodites inherit Satan's family tradition and join a process of infancy and

³¹⁰ Elsewhere he puns on the gender when he writes that “Itiel Incest maint fils engendre / Dessur la femeline gendre” (9154-5). Gender roles are suggestively reversed; in this case, Incest could be either an incestuous person or Dame Incest herself who is seducing and impregnating those of feminine gender, which is perfectly possible in Satan's family.

growth in this close-knit family. These children are marked by their vulnerable infancy as much as their gender. The women are not solely women, Gower emphasizes, but regardless of gender, they are all children: “Femelle et madle en un enfant.” Childhood is another aspect of the “double forme” of Satan’s daughters, a theme which Gower uses to detract from their dignity as creatures of power. For example, Ill Temper is compared to a spoiled child:

Petit dura son beau semblant;
Si rien vait contre son devis,
Sovent enbronchera le vis;
Plus est divers que nul enfant. (3909-12)

Her pleasant appearance will not last long. If anything goes against her design, she will often cast her face down; she is more changeable than any child.

Elsewhere, in a simile, Pride’s third daughter Arrogance is compared to a child to denigrate her:

Ly Surquiders, sicome l’enfant
Qe sa pelote est plus amant
Que tout le tresor que l’en voit
D’un petit bien se vait loant,
Dont il se quide estre aici grant
Come l’emperour du Rome estoit. (1459-64)

The arrogant man [or Arrogance (it need not be a man as it is in this translation)], like the child who loves his ball more than any treasure he sees, praises himself for some small good point, by which he thinks he is as great as the Emperor of Rome was.

In these two examples, Gower takes the vices to task, but his technique in doing so, enumerating children’s bratty behavior, seems almost cruel. The child with “divers” mood swings embodies one of the Seven Deadly Sin’s brood; one can almost suspect an autobiographical experience that leads to such a stern judgment. Gower’s irritated summation of an emotionally unhinged child carries over to trivialize moments when the child is happy. The joyful child with the treasured ball, sweet in another context,

is made to seem selfish and myopic; the love evoked in the word “*amant*” is debased as are children’s emotions and attachments.

These vilified babies, unlike their Miltonic counterparts, are *nurtured* into their roles, beginning life at the breast, and Satan keeps busy at family births in his maternal capacity. For example, when Homicide is born, an event so horrible that Gower says he has no words to describe it [“*Ma langue a ce ne me souffist*”], he conveys his horror through a maternal image of Satan nursing the babe on his own milk—“*la norrist / Du lait mortiel*” (4791, 4796-7). His milk flows to daughters and granddaughters alike, a perverse abundance captured in the comment that Superfluity is nourished (“*norri*”) by the Devil (8364). Elsewhere Gower’s vilifies the Vices by underscoring this devilish lactation in Satan’s hermaphroditic family: Covetousness suckles Treason, Flattery offers her nipple to her subjects; Gluttony endears herself to humanity by nursing them; and Delicacy nurses humans to sin with her sauces and dainty fare so that humans forgo plain milk (6734; 1429ff; 8509ff; 7825ff and 7873ff). Nursing in these cases can be manipulative rather than nourishing: “*Tout autrecy comme la norrice / Par son laitier l’enfant cherice, / Si fait ma dame Gloutenie*” [Just as a nurse, by her nursing, endears herself to a child, so does Lady Gluttony] (8509-11). Gower plays upon these metaphors as much as Gluttony plays upon the babe in arms but giving him his desire. Insinuating that the babe should know better, again Gower seems to be vilifying childhood as much as motherhood.

Yet however much Gower vilifies motherhood and this bond sealed with milk, there is a patient physicality to Satan’s nurturing of his brood that makes Satan’s side a bit more *human* than the Virtues enumerated in the next section of the poem, and God is shown as reacting to Satan’s threatening family by generating his own incestuous family in retaliation. He marries his Seven Daughters, the Virtues, to Reason. The word “*resoun*” is feminine earlier in the text, which makes Reason hermaphroditic,

though in all ways possible Gower effaces his physicality. In addition to having two genders, reason serves two masters; “resoun” on lines 366 and 413 is the false counsel of Sin and Temptation. This infernal reason is not allegorically present, but God’s Reason has the added task of finding a separate identity, though that identity is modeled after the Vices in similar terms of allegorical abstractions marrying and having offspring. Reason and the Virtues have 35 children, each one genetically engineered to combat a specific daughter of the Seven Deadly Sins, and a *Psychomachia* is promised later in the poem.

The Virtues, then, are meant to supplant the Vices, yet God’s imitation of Satan’s family lacks physical warmth and familial verisimilitude. Of all 35 character portraits, not one infant is born in need of the breast. The daughters come ready-made as though Gower is in haste to dispense with the allegory’s framework of marriage and birth. Daughters are introduced in a list: for example, he writes, “Humility has five daughters . . . The first is named Devotion,” or “Goodwill is the name of the fifth daughter born of perfect Charity,” (13153ff) or “Against foolish Negligence is the fifth daughter, Knowledge” (14593ff). Very few daughters are described as being *born*, and a few similes are the closest we get to a nurturing portrait of mother and babe. The daughter Affection, for example, is meeker than an infant, “Plus que l’enfant,” but Gower assures us that she is of mature age: “une fille de beal age,” (13524, 13515). Gower uses metaphoric language here and two other places to embellish his portraits without hampering them with the deeper range of commitments that are a part of motherhood, and indeed he attacks motherhood on two occasions: first, when he scorns Nature’s indiscriminant breastfeeding of the ugly and the beautiful, and second, when he contrasts matrimony, from which women have pain during childbirth, with Contenance, whose women have spiritual children of joy (17377; 17917-40). It is better to be pregnant by God than by man, better spiritual than biological.

Gower thus describes the Virtues as a list of perfections rather than a flesh and blood family, with children and mothers caring for them. Only once do they show affection, when Justice and Peace kiss like infant and nurse, yet this is less a spontaneous expression than a dramatization of Psalm 85:11, and the kiss is not shared again. Reason is largely absent from the poem and the family scene (perhaps parenting and reason are not compatible?), and the mothers do very little mothering of their adult daughters. Satan and Sin's brood for all its faults has the feel of family: we see cyclical growth from infant's neediness for milk and nurturing, to the parent's ability to fulfill those needs. The hermaphrodite is an easy target for Gower, but at its heart, the text shows a fear of the maternal. The Virtues and Reason, after all, are also lexically hermaphroditic—reason is a feminine noun earlier in the text, and various Virtues are understood by how they are at work in men. Humility, for example, is like a king's son who sucks the nipple—the closest Gower gets to letting the Virtues suck at the breast (12493ff). What sets the Virtues apart is their impersonal example of moral living, yet in being so figured, they lose their allegorical mobility as real women before the proposed *Psychomachia* can take place. Thus, after this lengthy set-up of 14 marriages and 70 daughters described at length, Gower abandons this war between the daughters of sin and the daughters of virtue, dropping the subject at the very moment his battle account should begin. As R. F. Yeager puts it, "it is this battle which provides the *raison d'être* for all the unions. By rights it ought to be cataclysmic, but instead it shrinks steadily in importance as it recedes before its elaborate preparations."³¹¹

Both Kurt Olsson and R. F. Yeager have both puzzled over the promised battle that never occurs. Kurt Olsson argues that denying his readers a battle is a way for

³¹¹ Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic*, 77.

Gower to teach his audience the prudence that they need to conquer vice.³¹² Yeager attempts to explain the anti-climax with a similar moral explanation: the “adumbrations of good and evil desire” are “the ‘real ‘battle’” in the *Mirour*.³¹³ However, the missing battle is not a didactic strategy for readers but as a decision on Gower’s part much in keeping with the structure of the *Mirour*, in which, as R. F. Yeager notes, the *Mirour*’s “primary metaphors are marriage and generation.”³¹⁴ The poem begins with Satan’s generation of Sin and the growth of their family. God reacts with matching generation for generation and even incest for incest, by wedding his seven daughters to Reason. The battle does not follow, I argue, because the daughters are insufficient as they are. God meticulously matched each Virtue against her corresponding Vice, but their perfection lacks human warmth and accessibility. Their daughters are born *against* evil, not born *for* goodness, and we gain the impression of a balance sheet of virtues canceling vices. What humanity needs, however, is a redemptive mother. God, then, must return to the project of generation and copy Satan more carefully. Previously, God imitated the strategy of the incestuous Seven Deadly Sins and the World. His next incestuous strategy is to imitate and outdo Satan and Sin’s original incest by impregnating His daughter Mary. Just as Satan engendered Death, God must engender Life.

Holy incest is described elsewhere in medieval literature, but Gower uniquely pairs God’s incest with Satan’s incest, so that Mary’s mothering of Christ echoes both Satan’s maternal feeling and the multiple roles Satan and Sin play to each other:

O dieus, ta file te conçoit,
 Et puis t’espouse t’enfantoit,
 Et ta norrice estoit t’amie,
 Ta soer en berces te gardoit,

³¹² Kurt Olsson, “The Cardinal Virtues and the Structure of Gower’s *Speculum Meditantis*,” *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 7 (1977), 127.

³¹³ Yeager, *John Gower’s Poetic*, 77.

³¹⁴ Yeager, *John Gower’s Poetic*, 77.

Et une vierge t'allaitoit,
Maisque ta miere estoit Marie,
La tue ancelle ot en baillie
Ton corps, qui molt sovent te lie,
Ta creature te portoit:
Ja puis n'ert tiele chose oïe,
Car en toute la compaignie
Forqu'une soule femme estoit. (28105-28116)

O God, Your daughter conceived You; and Your spouse gave You birth; and Your nurse was Your beloved; Your sister watched You in the cradle; and a virgin nursed You. Moreover, Your mother was Mary, Your handmaiden, who had Your body in her care and often bound up Your swaddling clothes. Your creature carried You. Never has such a thing been heard of since, for that entire company consisted of only one woman.

Maria lactans is fertile like a mother goddess, yet still a daughter, making her embody what Michelle Bolduc elegantly calls the poetics of contraries.³¹⁵ Gower's brilliance resides in inventing Satan *lactans* and bringing that transgendered figure and incest story into this portrait of generation and nurturing: a poetics of contraries and counterpoint on the grandest of scales. In Gower's beautiful passage above, the verbs *conçoit*, *enfantoit*, and *gardoit* all recall Satan's words when he watched over his own babe, as do the words *norrice and amie*. The line "Et puis t'espouse t'enfantoit," is not far different lexically or in terms of generative paradox from Sin's marriage to her son and brother in the line in which Gower announces, presumably with scorn, "La miere espousa son enfant" (234). Mary is no less a paradox than Sin and Satan, though Mary unlike Sin is not the mother of division but of a unity in Christ that collapses distinctions between mother and child because all in the Church are the bride of Christ. The riddle of incest is one way of exploring her divine role, rather than a way to categorize and condemn her, as Gower does with Satan and Sin. Mary's incest redeems man of his incest with Sin, and her figuring into the trope of incest seems to be Gower's way of redeeming rhetoric of its false fecundity.

³¹⁵ Michelle Bolduc, *The Medieval Poetics of Contraries* (University Press of Florida, 2006), 68.

Incest empowers Satan's and God's allegorical families. It is quite a change from the acts of male dominance found in Milton's text or Gower's *Tale of Apollonius*. In *Incest and Agency in Elizabeth's England*, Maureen Quilligan proposes that early modern women wrote about incest because incest for them was a means of female agency. Similarly, Gower's Sin and Mary are agents, not victims, and though Gower vilifies the incest of Satan's family, he nonetheless has God and the Virtues imitate Satan and Sin and presents the only case of Satan *lactans* I have been able to find. Caroline Walker Bynum discusses Jesus *lactans* and describes how Christ's breast maternally nurtures those who come to him.³¹⁶ Gower seems to ascribe to Satan this liminal space between male and female, parent, sibling, and spouse; his is the original trail of breast milk that Christ and Mary inherit and remake.

Besides using tropes of incest and motherhood to revise sacred history, Gower potentially uses them to revise his vast poem. In a recent article, Yeager notes that "the poem evolved fortuitously, rather than according to a calculated plan"; the first two sections loosely narrate Satan's and God's families and the estates, but the final section, the Life of Mary, for him may contain the poem's "most striking shift of tone and direction."³¹⁷ Yeager dates the Life of Mary's composition with Gower's residence at St. Mary Overes, where the Virgin presided as patroness. St. Mary's community gave Gower a new audience and fresh inspiration for the completion of his unfinished poem.³¹⁸ While this second-wind burst of creativity may have given Gower the push to complete his lengthy poem, what is striking to me is not the Life of Mary's divergence from what came before, but what eerily remains the common thread, namely, the incest narrative that forms the core structure of the first section of

³¹⁶ Caroline Walker Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (University of California Press, 1984).

³¹⁷ Yeager, "Gower's French Audience: The *Mirour de l'Omme*," *The Chaucer Review* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University, 2006), vol. 41, no. 2, 121.

³¹⁸ Yeager, "Gower's French Audience," 21-3.

the poem. The Life of Mary is less a break from the preceding material than the final inspiration needed to answer the poem's opening riddle in which nothing turns into nothing as an incestuous process. Gower creates a fictive situation in which God learns spiritually from Satan, just as Gower learns poetically from Satan. The riddled incest Gower vilifies turns out more prolific and more poignant than he may initially have counted on. Language's reversal of gender and roles also reverses his role as a poet, for he deciphers holy riddles through profane ones, and points out that both operate with the same rhetorical and incestuous structure. Like the 'nothing' of Gower's paradox, language verses and reverses in a process of returning and containing and belonging and recalling. Connected in language, Gower's Life of Mary answers the gap created by Satan's perverse yet compellingly intimate motherhood. The Virtues, for all their perfection, could only fight tit for tat with vice and convict humanity of sin; it is only Mary who can save sinners, and Gower underscores her power through her incest and her maternal physicality.

If Gower is willing to allow Satan to prefigure Mary and allow incest to rise from degradation to holy mystery, his treatment of riddles and riddle masters support what I have already said about social eloquence in Gower. He allows a voice and poetic authority in the marginalized and otherwise unlikely people. This lapsarian poetics seems counterintuitive for a poet so invested in social healing, but in fact the path to social healing may necessitate this attention to voices, an attention that only division can make evident. As a riddle maker himself, Gower understood the science of eloquence: rhetoric holds power to shape our view of an object from slanted angles; letters hold an arithmetical power that adds with phantom numbers. Such punning, riddled language disrupts the universe, setting the stars at odds or even, but though Gower saw the danger to language, he also saw that the enigma of language is part of

the Pauline process of seeing darkly, now, to see clearly on a future day. His insistence of measuring rhetoric by scientific standards points out linguistic complexity. Out of a universe of stars, metals, words, stones, and herbs, words may be the hardest thing to get right, but also the most important.

Epilogue

Life Beyond Change

A riddle specializes in impenetrability, but, to sum up what took me many words to say in my last chapter, Gower was not preoccupied with the impenetrability of riddles as much as their somatic representation and hall-of-mirrors effects; he was interested not in the riddle but the riddle as *lived*. Pagin noted that a riddle once solved becomes a new kind of poem, and Gower's *Tale of Apollonius* is a tale of a person who encounters a riddle and is changed. All the chapters of this dissertation are invested in similar metamorphoses for good or ill: the morphing of words into other words, of men into beasts, of lead to gold, of lion to lamb, of daughters to wives, of heads into tails. Gower's poetry fixates on the hinges by which the universe's doors swing, and how human lives shift under the force of these tectonic plates and astral circles.

In Gower's poetry, characters live and change not in a smooth trajectory but in jarring instances of self-identity and relations to others. Change is essential to Gower in ways that they are not to Chaucer, who depends upon type-set characters who may be complex and larger than life, but remain who they were when we first met them. Gower's human lives are more like those of the *Gawain*-poet, who tells tales of a father changed by a lost daughter, or a knight changed by guilt. Likewise, Gower is interested in the turning points that makes a character change from one moment to the next: a lover watching his beloved kiss another man (Poliphemus); a woman in bed with her husband chatting about her need to see her sister again (Procne); a woman in bed with her husband chatting about making a feast for the Emperor before the couple leaves Rome (Constance); a wife being prompted to notice the cup she drinks from and discovers it is her father's skull (Rosemund); a lover looking into the mirror and

discovering that he is old (Amans).

A pattern here is the specificity, almost the smallness, of the event or instrument that brings in great change: not war but the cup, not Genius' wisdom but a mirror. Domesticity often serves Gower as a key setting for change. "Thus as they lihe abedde and spieke" are words that ground the scene between Constance and Allee in drama; there is a sit-com simplicity to the presentation and a tenderness to the portrait of husband and wife—"a touch typical of Gower at his best," comments Winthrop Wetherbee, for its healthy dose of domesticity (2.1457).³¹⁹ It is a setting that Chaucer either exploits for fabliau or sidesteps uneasily. Chaucer's Custance goes to her husband's bed out of wifely duty, no more. In Gower, however, the bed provides the setting that sets in place the final piece of restoration and redemption, as Constance orchestrates the final reunion between father and daughter. The difference between the two poets in part shows Gower's more active heroine, but her domestic role as wife and mother, as opposed to saint, is what makes more active, as Wetherbee has shown. When Constance is literally at sea and lacks the will to live, she looks upon her child and consciously takes on the role of motherhood as Chaucer's Custance never did:

"So mot I nedes be that weie
For moderhed and for tendresse
With al myn hole besinesse
Ordeigne me for thilke office,
As sche which schal be thi norrice."
Thus was sche strengthed for to stonde;
And tho sche tok hire child in honde
And gaf it sowke, and evere among
Sche wepte, and otherwhile song
To rocke with hire child aslepe. (2.1072-81)

³¹⁹ Winthrop Wetherbee, "Constance in the World in Chaucer and Gower," in *John Gower: Recent Readings. Papers Presented at the Meetings of the John Gower Society at the International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, 1983-88*, edited by R. F. Yeager, (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, 1989), 72.

Changing suddenly from swooning to standing, Constance becomes the mast of her ship. A saint falsely accused of witchcraft, she is an epilogue to Gower's story of monsters, riddles, and mothers who give suck and center themselves around the child at their breast. That "office" makes her sing when circumstances dictate that she should weep. What Gower seems to be doing here is finding a human motivation to answer the riddle of what makes a women endure suffering this severely. The bed and the ship, the breast and the sea, frame Constance's experience; domestic force triumphs over fairy-tale mother-in-laws and brute nature alike.

However, Constance's power is precarious, and things could have gone the other way, as it does in another tale with another couple in another bed, chatting at night:

This Progné, as sche lay him beside,
Bethoughte hir hou it mihte be
That sche hir soster myhte se (5.5574-6)

What is so shocking about the rape of Philomela are the very ordinary circumstances that occasion Tereus' voyage to go fetch her. There is no indication that the marriage is unhappy; that Tereus is a brute; that this misfortune was a foreseen from the beginning. In Book 6 of *The Metamorphoses*, Ovid warns us early on what kind of marriage we are reading about:

When they were married, Juno was not there
To bless the rite, nor Hymen nor the Graces.
The Furies held the torches, torches seized
From mourners' hands; the Furies made their bed. (Trans. Melville)

As with Gower's Poliphemus, there is no indication that Gower's Tereus is or will be a monster. His marriage to Procne, fleetingly conveyed, was happy. "A lusti lif with hire he hadde, / Til" that chance conversation with Procne (5.5572-3). Her request is attentive to his desires, "if it liked him," to indulge her; she does not sound mad with grief but seems a happy person wishing only to be happier still (5580). Tereus

oblige, and they embrace, “clippe” and kiss (5591). The scene mirrors the intimacy and domestic tranquility of Constance and Allee, but instead of a banquet reuniting kin sundered by seas, we behold a man “devoured” and devouring, “Riht as a wolf which takth his preie,” while his victim cries for parents lost across the waters (5625, 5633). The scene recalls Constance’s own escape from rape and sets off the wishful thinking of her ability to ward off rape merely by pushing her rapist over the bow as he absurdly takes in the view. The grit of Philomela’s tale and her journey toward expression becomes of narrative of infernal feasting. When Procne forsakes motherhood, the very pillar that kept Constance standing, and slays Itys, Gower underscores the breakdown of this family in somatic terms:

And in hir chambre prively
 This child withouten noise or cry
 Sche slou, and hieu him al to pieces.
 And after with diverse spieces
 The fleissh, whan it was so toheewe,
 Sche takth, and makth therof a sewe,
 With which the fader at his mete
 Was served, til he hadde him ete;
 That he ne wiste hou that it stod,
 Bot thus his oughne fleissh and blod
 Himself devoureth agein kinde,
 As he that was tofore unkinde. (5.5895-5906)

The rhyme of “agein kinde” and “unkinde” expresses the eye for an eye logic of the victims who victimize, forcing Tereus to devour, literally, as he devoured before, figuratively. “Pieces” are horrifically paired in rhyme with “spieces,” as pieces of Itys’ flesh repackaged and subjected to the common household spice rack. It is domestic vengeance, in which Procne uses her subservient role in the kitchen as the instrument for revenge. The two sisters’ own Poliphemus moment—the change from what they seemed before—erupts in this scene; they prove aware of Tereus’ action against “kinde” yet are unrepentant of the savage murder of Itys, a voiceless, vulnerable, and trusting child. Their empowerment is their bane; they, too, become

voiceless and their bird-chatter serves as white-noise to conclude the inconclusive tale.

From chatting in bed to carving one's son: how did we come to this? Gower seems to allow for this question by refraining from hints, by letting the characters experience deep change. In Gower's world, predetermination is not change; characters experience change when they act in the moment. Whether they take the path of Constance and Alla or Procne and Tereus, Gower lets his characters start out fresh, with all the possibility for hope. In such a spirit, he writes, "as sche lay him beside"; "as they lihe abedde and spieke." A modern translation, pared of the specificity of the bedroom, would read, "It was just an ordinary day."

In *The Year of Magical Thinking*, Joan Didion's 2005 memoir exploring her husband John Gregory Dunne's death from a heart attack and her subsequent life apart from him while managing the health of her terminally ill daughter, Didion explores the psychological games played in the face of loss, the circuitous paths the intellect must take to parse and rationalize tragedy. In the statement, "it was just an ordinary day," the "just" and "ordinary" underscore the unacceptability of trauma in the context of comforting routine. The ordinary is a frail buttress against loss, a framing device that tries to hold onto what was and deny what is. Didion opens her memoir with hard words, contextualized, as with Gower, in the domestic:

Life changes fast.

Life changes in the instant.

You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends.

*A question of self-pity.*³²⁰

For Gower, and for Didion, stories begin with the ordinary day: the family at dinner, the couple in bed, the ordinary conversation with the ordinary people in one's life. Gower's changes are not what we would call medical, though lovesickness was considered a physical malady, but they center around psychological processes as

³²⁰ Joan Didion, *The Year of Magical Thinking* (New York: Random House, 2007), 3.

inscrutable as alchemy. Life changes not because Polyphemous is a cyclops and Tereus a born rapist, but because they make choices that affect them and everyone around them. Hugh White wrote about Gower's sympathetic villains, but Gower's will to understand goes deeper than Mundus, Canace and Machaire, and other characters whose so-called villainy evokes sympathy from readers who can relate to the complexities of love.³²¹ Tereus and Mundus are worlds apart, but Tereus began as the better man, if that bedroom scene is any indication, but in executing his wife's wishes, he then makes terrible choices that make Mundus' crimes forgivable, and our own collusion with Mundus lighthearted and permissible. With the tales of Constance, Procne and Philomela, and Paulina, Gower experiments with marital harmony and the attack on the domestic; he chronicles the moment that severs marital ties, the nature of the cup handed to Rosemund and the nature of her response. Gower's greatest villains are unsettling because they started out happy, hopeful, and ordinary.

Gower seems fascinated with change, but I would argue that his fixation is not the histrionic, political paranoia some scholars have postulated. He was certainly a political poet and wrote to understand the ailing social body of which he was a part. But his scale was both greater and more intimate than the political body. His attention to minute changes to words and bodies reveal that the extraordinary is nested within the ordinary, that change is not only possible but the nature of things. He marveled at the links between constellations, humors, marriage, metals, and societies; he wondered what made them work and what made them fail. Even the failures, however, are invested with the same beauty as the successes; he does not take away Tereus' and Procne's former love. He lets them work humanity out of their system, but it was

³²¹ Hugh White, "Gower's Sympathetic Villains," in *Re-Visioning Gower*, edited by R. F. Yeager, (Kalamazoo, MI: Western Michigan University, 1998), 222-4.

there in some abundance at the start. Their constellations could have been fortunate, had their choices been different.

Gower lets characters fail—even Amans, yet in such a way to suggest that failure is intervention, by which he can become who he really is meant to be. After the lengthy *Tale of Apollonius* in Book 8, Amans seems yet on target for gleaning any tips from Genius as his *magister amoris*. He confesses his unrequited love in terms that speak of alchemy’s busy workshop, and the multiplicity that yields the one good thing, but in Amans’ case, the singular response to his multiple linguistic efforts is negative:

For al that evere I skile may,
I am concluded with a nay.
That o sillable hath overthowe
A thousand wordes on a rowe
Of suche as I best speke can” (8.2048-2051).

If talking could have gotten Amans anywhere, either quantity (“A thousand wordes on a rowe”) or quality (“skile”), his lady would have been his long ago, but the lady’s syllable is at once tiny and insurmountable, uneroded after many thousands of couplets. As we saw in the *Vox*, syllables have revolutionary power—the power to revolve hierarchies, government, and nature itself. Syllables “overthowe” the stream of language that seeks to line up a meter, a discourse, and a love story. The lady’s syllable makes a suggestive statement about language’s multiplicity and singular finality, with broad implications for the whole poem. To hit this jarring “o sillable” here at the end of the poem is striking—all that fluidity in language hits the point that will not budge; her word is like the stone that destroys Nebuchadnezzar’s statue. At last we get some idea how this poem will end: not with the lady’s change of heart, but with Amans’s dismissal from Venus’ service. We detect the lover’s arrogant assumption that a thousand words should magically transform a woman into his lover, though we also pity him, for the fact that the lady and her one syllable remain constant

comments upon the loss of two intertwined fantasies, the fantasy of love and of language. Amans seems hesitant here, sensing his skill is not enough, and indeed those last words “best speke can” show him dejectedly choking over alliteration. He coughs like Chaucer’s Yeoman in the aftermath of an explosive experiment, while the practicioners argue over what went wrong and why plurality cannot yield the desired singularity. Amans concludes his complaint with a request to Genius, “That ye me be som weie teche / What is my beste, as for an ende” (8.2058-9). That “ende” suggests a lover’s consummation, but its air of finality in the request seems in opposition to the lady’s “o sillable” and suggests that Amans is willing to get whatever end he may achieve, so long as he escapes that rejection.

It is at this point that Genius counsels Amans to give up his love. The language with which he couches this admittedly anticlimactic advice is suggestively the language of harmonious science that weaves together the stars, creation, and rhetoric:

Nou at this time that I schal
As for conclusioun final
Conseile upon thi nede sette.
So thenke I finaly to knette
This cause, where it is tobroke,
And make an ende of that is spoke. (8.2070-4)

Genius proposes a “conclusioun,” a word that signifies finality, though it is also used, as Louise Bishop has shown, to convey uncertainty in the context of alchemical change, in which Latinate terms are garbled as much as the experiments are botched: more than once in *The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale*, “the word refers to failed transformations.”³²² Amans is about to be the subject of an alchemical transformation, and Genius is the master scientist. Like the *sette*, *knette*, *pronounce* of Book 7’s treatises on astronomy and rhetoric, Genius sets about rearranging Amans’ life. The

³²² Bishop, *Words, Stones, & Herbs*, 123.

language marks Genius as a creator-figure, which is not altogether amiss, considering the numerous times in which Genius commits himself to *enforme* Amans—not just to inform him but give him the form he seems to lack on his own. Genius’ language, then, incorporates Amans into creation.

Part of that incorporation is to be *sette* and *knette* in wholeness with the environment. Amans seems to reflect that understanding of being connected with the cosmos when he resists Genius’ counsel on account of Genius’ lack of empathy:

Mi wo to you is bot a game,
That fielen nocht of that I fiele.
The fieling of a mannes hiele
Mai nocht be likned to the herte:
I mai nocht, thogh I wolde, asterte,
And ye be fre from al the peine
Of love, wherof I me pleigne.
It is riht esi to comaunde;
The hert which fre goth on the launde
Not of an oxe what him eileth;
It falleth ofte a man merveileth
Of that he seth an other fare,
Bot if he knewe himself the fare,
And felt it as it is in soth,
He scholde don riht as he doth,
Or elles werse in his degré:

Amans initially voices his resistance in terms readily understandable—”Mi wo to you is bot a game, / That fielen nocht of that I fiele.” However, the next sentence does not clarify Amans’ actual feelings (there is no direct statement of his hopes and frustrations, or his sense of betrayal at spending all this time with a man who, with no prior warning, declares Amans’ love “a sinne,” 2088) but instead a murky elaboration of how limited Genius’ empathy is. He uses terms of the inverted body to explain the gap between them. Like the inverted crop and root and foot in glove of the Prologue or the hose over shoe of Book 7, Amans speaks in terms of a body gone wrong: the feeling of a heel versus a heart. Amans’ heart pain is not to be confused with the heel

pain Genius seems to detect, and he critiques Genius' medicine for treating a heart wound as a superficial heel wound. Amans speaks at once of one body with mismatched, misunderstood parts, and portrays Genius and Amans as two disjointed bodies.

The ensuing contrast between the hart and the ox points out that Genius misdiagnoses Amans: he is no hart, and his heart is not free to make his choice, but bound to love like an ox to the plough. Besides serving as an early pun on heart and hart, the metaphor evokes the division of Amans' experience from the harmony of Arion's world, in which beasts live in peace and freedom. Amans' ox more closely resembles the bondage of Nebuchadnezzar, whose years as an ox made him a marvel and an emblem of the inverted hierarchy. Like Nebuchadnezzar, though, Amans does not remain in bondage, nor is he voiceless. As Genius' rhyme pattern suggests—*sette, knette, tobroke, spoke*—Amans will achieve unity and a voice even as he is broken. The gift of confession Genius mentions on line 2075 is intimately linked with the gift of speech—Genius' own, but also the speech of Amans, even if that voice warms to its task initially by complaining about his mismatched role as lover and as a man in creation.

Much later, after Cupid removes his dart, Venus cools his heart, and Amans beholds his image in the mirror, Amans accepts his unexpected denial from the joys of love and, still reflecting on his image, compares his body to an anatomical man whose body acts as a calendar registering the effects of winter:

I made a liknesse of miselve
Unto the sondri monthes twelve,
Wherof the yeer in his astat
Is mad, and stant upon debat,
That lich til other non acordeth.
For who the times wel recordeth,
And thanne at Marche if he beginne,
Whan that the lusti yeer comth inne,

Til Augst be passed and Septembre,
 The myhty youthe he may remembre
 In which the yeer hath his deduit
 Of gras, of lef, of flour, of fruit,
 Of corn and of the wyny grape.
 And afterward the time is schape
 To frost, to snow, to wind, to rein,
 Til eft that Mars be come agein:
 The wynter wol no somer knowe,
 The grene lef is overthrowe,
 The clothed erthe is thanne bare,
 Despuiled is the somerfare,
 That erst was hete is thanne chele.
 And thus thenkende thoghtes fele,
 I was out of mi swoune affraied,
 Wherof I sih my wittes straied,
 And gan to clepe hem hom agein. (8.2837-61)

Amans' body undergoes an alchemical change from hot to cool, from lover to man of prayer, and the change is not a joyful one: Amans is "affraied" from his swoon by this chilling portrait of himself, pared of his youthful hopes and the sense of humor that has sustained him though long denial from his lady.

C. S. Lewis famously insisted that this would have been the strongest point to conclude Gower's poem. It is true that this would have been a most dramatic way to end, but Gower, having shown us Amans' Poliphemus-moment of metamorphosis, sees his character through, and part of that following through is to portray Amans the lover as Gower the poet. Just as Genius previously noted a cycle of being *sette, knette, tobroke, and spoke*, so Amans has been broken yet lives beyond winter and achieves his voice as a poet. Venus tells him to leave her court in order to attend to his own writing, to go "Wher ben thi bokes, as men telleth, / Whiche of long time thou hast write" (8.2926-7). Venus' advice suggests her own awareness that her court is a place to "tarie" but not to grow a poet's voice—at least not Gower's voice (2924). Gower's dismissal from Venus' court is a complicated matter, but what seems an encouraging possibility is that his exile from that court frees him to write the *Confessio*. The

parallel with Ovid's exile and authorship seems relevant, and the connection between the two allows for the theory that Amans is not dismissed simply because he is old; exile is an arbitrary process. Gower turns such lemons into lemonade with a text deeply aware of social division yet hopeful of harmony. It seems encouraging, too, that from the lady's "o syllable" Gower is able to craft a 33,000 line poem, "A bok for Engelondes sake," as well as one poet's exploration of what it means to love and to belong (Prol. 24).

APPENDIX A

Rime Riche in Direct Discourse in Gower and Chaucer

1. 21 speakers of *rime riche* in Gower's *Confessio Amantis* (excluding Genius, Amans, and Venus)

Antiochus 8.413-4 faile
Ariadne 5.5445-6 hierie
Bardus (completes Adrian's line with RR) 5.5015-6 half
Beggar (*Two Pastries*) 5.2397-8 riche; 5.2425-6 help
Boniface 2.2883-4 laste
Cephalus 4.3219-20 armes
Cerymon 8.1211-2 hierie; 8.1215-1216 faile
Constantine 2.3247-8 wise
Diana 5.6277-8 touche
Lady addressing Rosiphelee 4.1381-2 leve; 4.1419-20 laste
Lucrece 7.4817-8 hierie
Lycurgus 7.2981-2 fare
Nectanabus 6.1877-8 hierie; 6.1939-40 broken RR behote / be hote
Peronelle 1.3253-4 maii; 1.3273-4 kepe; 1.3319-20 hierie
Perseus 2.1659-60 kepe
Penelope 4.167-8 wente
Princess of Pentapolis 8.901-2 faile
Procne 5.5857-8 hierie
Rosiphelee 4.1369-70 hierie
Solomon 7.3901-2 regne
Thaïse 8.1451-2 weie

2. 28 speakers of *rime riche* in Chaucer's corpus (excluding pilgrims)

Abstinence RR 7535-6 thought
Alcyone BD 93-4 here
Anelida AA 333-6 drye
Antigone TC 2.848-50; 2.870-3 laste
Arcite A 1511-2 may
Baronage to Love RR 5939-40 wise
Black Knight BD 615-6 werre; 621-2 halt; 629-30 floures/flour ys; 931-2 harmed/harm hid;
659-60 chek her/chekker; 883-4 herte; 1089-90 say; 1271-2 weyes
Calkas TC 4.81-2 leve/leeve
Cecilia G 477-9 heere
Commoner E 116-7 (CIT) wyse
Criseyde TC 2.100-3 rede; 3.942-3 wise; 3.1563-6 fare (completes rhyme); 4.1231-2 dede;
5.690-1 longe; 5.975-8 was; 5.1084-5 leve

Diomedea aweye/weye at TC 5.93-6; 5.104-5 meene/mene; 5.884-6 se
 Eagle HF 747-8 see
 False-Semblant RR 7093-4 prophetis / prophet is; 7301-2 forwardis (completes
 rhyme)
 Friar D 1747-8 (*SumT*) chese
 Hag D 1155-6 (*WBT*) dedis / deed is
 Hector TC 1.121-3 here
 January E 1913-4 may
 Judge C 173-4 heere
 Knight F 145-6 (*SqT*) heere
 Love places / place is RR 6119-20; he(e)re/heere RR 6223-4 and 6797-8
 Pandarus TC 1.617-9 longe; 1.667-70 sore; 1.687-9 vices/vice is; 1.697-8 wise; 1.932-
 4 love; 1.961-4 (and 959) wyse; 1.991-2 wise; 2.191-3 ben; 2.443-5 see; 2.513-6 to
 and fro; 2.545-6 longe; 2.1031-3 harpe; 2.1628-9 here; 2.1644-5 here; 3.151-2 yerne;
 3.254-6 meene; 3.291-2 dede; 3.774-5 calle; 3.785-7 wente; 3.851-2 wise; 4.531-2
 fare; 4.582-4 me; 5.380-3 fowles / foul is
 Priest RR 7687-8 wise
 Summoner D 1767-7 (*SumT*) placis / place is
 Theseus A 1837-8 lief / leef; A 3031-2 se
 Third tercel eagle PF 464-7 here
 Thopas B2 2007-8 thee
 Troilus TC 1.536-7 laste; 1.1047-8 laste; 4.543-4 here; 5.422-5 may; 5.1409-
 12 may; 5.1717-20 may; 5.1353-6 moore

APPENDIX B

Gower's *Rime Riche* Couplets

The following is an alphabetized list of Gower's *rime riche* couplets, including information such as the speaker or the name of the individual tale. Pickles and Dawson include a list of all couplet rhymes in their *Concordance*, but this color-coded list is designed to show, at a glance, which speakers use which rhymes, or which tales employ these rhymes. Occasional glosses are from Russell Peck's edition to help contextualize the couplet. When another *rime riche* couplet is part of a pair or cluster, I make a note of this or expand the amount of text quoted. Seeing the clusters allows one to appreciate how frequent and rich they are.

I also include a selected number of *rime riche* variants, particularly those discussed in Chapter One, such as pairing *schipe* and *felaschipe* or *forme* and *enforme*. However, this list of variants is incomplete, mostly because the task is mammoth, and it is difficult to know where to draw the line. For example, if I include *beholde / holde*, should I include *beholde / olde* and *holde / olde*? My selections should be regarded as just that—selections of interest that show a variety of possibilities available to Gower, from a simple 'un,' as in *bounde / unbounde* (5.7733-4); reduplication as in *tore / totore* (Prol. 413-414); or rhymes that play upon the physical and abstract aspects of words, like *tyde / betyde*. The list of *rime riche* variants are marked 'qRR' or 'quasi *rime riche*,' a term coined by Masayoshi Ito which has the virtue of reserving 'v' for the variants in the manuscripts.

I compiled this list to get a better sense of how couplet rhymes work in the *Confessio*, and wished to make it available to others in case it aids another reader's couplet hunting. This list may be particularly useful to those who wish to get a sense of how a word is used over the entire *Confessio*, in different tales and by different speakers. One can get a sense of the appropriateness of which speakers use which rhymes (Amans, for example, uses *meete*), or which point in the poem they occur (*preie* occurs in Book 5, the book on religion, and 'drink' and 'drunk' occur in Book 6). One can also see the proverbial and colloquial nature of these couplets and determine to what degree rhyme underscores sententious speech, shows humor, or is used for transitional purposes (between tales, for example).

The RR couplets are color-coded by speaker:

RED-Amans

BLUE-Confessor

GREEN-Tale (told by Confessor)

PINK-Venus

ALONG (1)

4.2817-2818 RR along – Amans; wakeful for lady—part of three RR within 20 lines
I tarie forth the nyht along,
For it is noght on me along / To slep . . .

ARMES (7)

4.2131-2132 RR armes – Tale of Hercules and Achelons
And thus with gret decerte of armes
He wan him for to ligge in armes

4.3219-3220 RR armes – Cephalus speaks; The Prayer of Cephalus
With hire which lith in min armes,
Withdrawgh the banere of thin armes [banner of your heraldic sign; i.e., sunrise]

5.1473-1474 RR armes – Genius; on Religions/Greeks
The god of schuldres and of armes
Was Hercules; for he in armes
The myhtieste was . . .

5.5687-5688 RR armes – Tale of Tereus, Procne, and Philomena
[Tereus caught Philomela's hair]
With whiche he bond ther bothe hire armes –
That was a fieble dede of armes –
And . . . clippeth also faste / Hire tunge

6.29-30 RR armes – Genius; on drunkenness
He is a noble man of armes,
And yit no strengthe is in his armes..

7.4349-50 RR armes – Genius; on Chastity; David had lovers but put martial arms
first (Genius omits Uriah's wife Bathsheba)
Of lust to ligge in ladi armes
He lefte noght the lust of armes

8.2497-2498 RR armes – Amans; The Vision of Cupid
The most matiere of her speche
Was al of knythod and of armes,
And what it is to ligge in armes
With love, whanne it is achieved.

AS(S)ENT (5)

1.1493-1494 RR as(s)ent – Tale of Florent

The wisest of the lond asent,
Bot natheles of on assent

1.1743-1744 RR as(s)ent – Tale of Florent
The prive' wommen were asent,
That scholden ben of his assent

3.1917-1918 RR as(s)ent – Orestes
As this Climestre him hadde asent, [sent for]
And weren bothe of on assent. . .

4.1579-1580 RR as(s)ent – Jephthah's Daughter
And therupon of on assent
The maidens were anon asent. . .[sent for]

8.931-932 RR as(s)ent – Tale of Apollonius
For he wol have hire good assent,
Hath for the queene hir moder sent.

Q-SENT / ASSENT (1 sample qRR)

2.1479-1480 qRR sent / assent – Constance
The king Allee forth with th'assent
Of Couste his wif hath thider sent
Moris. . .
plus besoghte/soghte

BEFALLE / BE FALLE (1)

8.2105-2106 broken RR befalle / be falle – Amans
[Love is blind and cannot know]
Wher that he goth, til he be falle.
Forthi, bot if it so befalle

BEHOLDE (2)

7.4175-4176 RR beholde – Genius; on Pity: Wisdom and the King
To hem wher he is most beholde; [indebted]
Thei scholde his Pite most beholde [see, regard]

8.567-568 RR beholde – Apollonius of Tyre
[Apollonius honored w a statue, so his face . . .]
Mihte every maner man beholde,
So as the cite' was beholde
It was of latoun overgilt

BEHOTE / BE HOTE (1) [see *hote* and *hote / behote*]

6.1939-40 broken RR behote / be hote – Tale of Nectanabus; Nectanabus as speaker to lady; tells of god-begotten son
“And in such a wise, I you behote,
The god of erthe he schal be hote.”

BELIEVE (2)

7.3915-6 RR believe – Solomon’s Wisdom; 3RR in short passage (see good and regne)
Ferst him [a king] behoveth for to have
After the God and his believe
Such conseil which is to believe . . .

5.785-786 RR believe – Genius; last couplet to his intro on Religion
As folk which stant out of believe,
Thei schull receive, as we believe.
[rhyme word suits the subject matter on Religion]

BELIEVE / MISBELIEVE (1)

5.833-834 qRR believe / misbelieve – Genius; last couplet on The Egyptians; note the ensuing couplet introducing the Greek Religion:
Fro resoun stant in misbelieve
For lacke of lore, as I believe.
Among the Greks, out of the weie, [confused]
As thei that reson putte aweie . . .

BERE / FORBERE (12)

1.243-4 qRR bere/forbere – Genius
Of prest, whos ordre that I bere,
So that I wol nothing forbere

1.2841-2 qRR bere/forbere – Nebuchadnezzar’s Vainglorious Punishment
The rote schal be faste bounde,
And schal no mannes herte bere,
Bot every lust he schal forbere
Of man, and lich an oxe his mete
Of gras . . .

2.159-160 qRR bere/forbere –Acis and Galatea
His herte mai it nocht forbere

That he ne roreth lich a bere

2.537-538 qRR bere/forbere – Amans; on envy

I am al redy for to bere

Mi peine, and also to forbere [desist from]

What thing that ye wol nocht allowe.

For who is bounden, he mot bowe.

So wol I bowe unto youre heste,

For I dar make this beheste . . .

2.1767-1768 qRR bere/forbere – Demetrius and Perseus

What man that mihte wepne bere

Of alle he wolde non forbere

3.411-412 qRR bere/forbere – Amans; on wrath and the pain he feels at others loving his lady

That I miself schal nocht forbere

The Wrathe which that I now bere

4.1495-6 qRR bere/forbere – Genius; after Rosiphelee story

[maiden loses a year or two or three before marriage]

Whyl sche the charge myhte bere [burden]

Of children, which the world forbere [fail to impose]

Ne mai, bot if it scholde faile. [unless offspring shd be lacking]

5.5387-8 qRR bere/forbere – Theseus and Ariadne

He scholde hire love and trouthe bere;

And sche, which mihte nocht forbere, [resist]

bere/forbere – but no animal bears

5.6309-10 qRR bere/forbere – Calistona

Juno's double qRR to chastise Calis. and change her (it is a devastating touche)
beauty will be "torned/mistorned"

And al the feture of thi face

In such a wise I schal deface,

That every man thee schal forbere."

With that the liknesse of a bere

Sche tok and was forschape anon.

7.2535-3 qRR bere/forbere – Ahab and Micaiah; flattery vs. plain truth

Bot thei that spieken wordes liche

To trouthe and wolde it nocht forbere,

For hem was non astat to bere

7.3969-3970 qRR bere/forbere – Courtiers and the Fool

He bad hem for to telle it plein,
That thei no point of soth forbere,
Be thilke feith that thei him bere.

7.4277-8 qRR bere/forbere – Genius; on Chastity
For if a man himself excite [cause]
To drenche, and wol it nocht forbere, [drown]
The water schal no blame bere.

BLAME (1)

1.3053-4 RR blame – Genius
Ther mai no man to mochel blame
A vice which is for to blame

BORE (2)

3.2225-6 RR bore – Genius; to A on murderous lovers following Tale of Orestes
The lawe stod er we were bore,
How that a kinges swerd is bore
In sign that he schal defende . . .

5.1697-8 RR bore – Genius; on Religion: Jews; born
Thei faileden, whan Crist was bore,
Bot hou that thei here feith have bore,
It nedeth nocht to tellen al.

BORE / FOBORE (1)

4.2343-4 qRR bore/forbore – Genius; on idleness in major speech (Solomon)
Solomon says “As the briddes to the flihte
Ben made, so the man is bore
To labour,” which is nocht fobore [avoided]
To hem that thenken for to thryve.

BORE / UNBORE (1)

5.1747-1748 qRR bore/unbore – Genius; on Religion: Christians
It helpeth nocht a man be bore,
If Goddes Sone were unbore

BOTHE (1)

2.1457-1458 RR bothe – Constance
Sche preide him and conseileth bothe,

That for the worschipe of hem bothe

CAST (1)

8.2909-2910 RR cast – Venus addresses John Gower

Now thou art ate laste cast,
This have I for thin ese cast

CASTE / OVERCAST (1 qRR)

6.2355-6 qRR caste / overcaste – Nectanabus

His olde sleyhtes whiche he caste,
Yonge Alisandre hem overcaste

CHARGE (1)

4.2241-2242 RR charge – Genius; on the rich and the poor; noun/verb

I not of hem which hath the lasse
Of worldes good, bot as of charge
The lord is more for to charge, [be held responsible]
Whan God schal his accompte hiere, [hear]
For he hath had hise lustes hiere. [pleasures here]

CHESE (1)

3.501-2 RR chese – Amans; on wrath and cheste

he speaks of picking the best, most pleasing words
Whiche I cowthe in myn herte chese, [choose]
And serve hem forth instede of chese [cheese]

CHIEF / MESCHIEF (1 qRR)

6.307-8 qRR chief / meschief – Genius

For lovedrunke is the meschief
Above alle othre the most chief

CLOS/DISCLOSE (2)

3.191-192 qRR clos/disclose – Tale of Canace and Machaire; sound play with *aros*

The wombe aros, and sche gan tremble,
And hield hire in hire chambre clos
For drede it scholde be disclos

3.769-70 qRR clos / disclose – Genius

Mi sone, be thou war ther by,
And hold thi tunge stille clos.
For who that hath his word desclos

COM(M)UNE (5)

1.651-652 RR comune – Genius; on hypocrisy
they care little for small men
Bot thei that passen the comune [surpass the ordinary]
With suche him liketh to comune

6.2431-2432 RR comune – Genius; end of bk6, on Alexander and Aristotle
And for it helpeth to comune, [since; discuss]
Al ben thei nocht to me comune [Although they are not]

7.2199-2200 RR com(m)une – Genius
The thridde errour is harm comune,
With which the poeple mot commune
Of wronges

7.2709-10 RR com(m)une – Genius; on Justice
For wher the lawe mai comune [unite]
The lordes forth with the commune [commonwealth]

8.2935-2936 RR comune – Venus addresses John Gower
For in the lawe of my comune, [fellowship]
We be nocht schape to comune, [discourse together]
Thiself and I, never after this.

CORDE / ACORDE (1 sample qRR)

8.623-6 qRR corde / acorde – Tale of Apollonius
Neptunus, wolde nocht acorde,
Bot al tobroke cable and corde,
Er thei to londe myght aproche,
The schip toclep upon a roche. . .

COWTHE (1)

1.2861-2862 RR cowthe – Nebuchadnezzar's Vainglorious Punishment; three-line of
sound play on cowthe
He loveth, for he cowthe wel
Divine that non other cowthe: [To elucidate as no others knew how to]
To him were alle thinges cowthe, [known]
As he it hadde of Goddes grace. [Since he it (understanding) had by]

DEDE (1)

1.1037-1038 RR dede – Tale of Mundus and Paulina
And whan the prestes weren dede,
The temple of thilke horrible dede
Thei thoghten purge, and thilke ymage . . .

DORE (1)

4.2825-2826 RR dore – Amans, daring at the door of his lady
And otherwhile, if that I dore,
Er I come fulli to the dore,
I torne agein and feigne a thing,
As thogh I hadde lost a ring

DOUN (1)

4.3021-3022 RR doun – Tale of Ceix and Alcyone, Sleep's domain:
He lith with many a pilwe of doun:
The chambre is strowed up and doun
With swevenes many thousandfold.

DREDE (4)

Prol.1081-1082 RR drede – Amans
Hath set his world, it is to drede;
For that bringeth in the comun drede

5.6059-6060 RR drede – Amans, on lust, would never commit rape
Men sein that every love hath drede; [anxiety]
So folweth it that I hire drede [revere]

6.1249-1250 RR drede – Genius; following Nero's sensuality
And doth such thing withoute drede [fearlessly]
Wherof him oghte wel to drede.

7.3579-3580 RR drede – Tale of the Mountain and the Mouse
And upon fantasie drede,
Whan that ther is no cause of drede.

DRINKE (3)

6.285-286 RR drinke – Amans on drunkenness of lovers
As I am drunke of that I drinke,

So am I ek for falte of drinke

6.621-622 RR drinke – Genius; on Delicacy
And sondri wyn and sondri drinke,
Wherof that he wole ete and drinke.

6.1139-1140 RR drinke – Genius; on Delicacy following Dives and Lazarus
He ett, and drinketh the beste drinke;
Bot hou that evere he ete or drinke . . .

DRUNKE (2)

6.381-382 RR drunke – Tale of Jupiter and the Two Cases
And in this wise men be drunke,
After the drink that thei have drunke.

6.471-472 RR drunke – Tristram and Isolde
In every mannes mouth it is
Hou Tristram was of love drunke
With Bele Ysolde, when thei drunke
The drink which Brangwein hem betok,
Er that king Marc his eem hire tok
To wyve, as it was after knowe.
And ek, mi sone, if thou wolt knowe,
As it hath fallen overmore
In loves cause, and what is more . . .

ENDE (1)

5.529-530 RR ende – Genius; on jealousy of lovers
For where he comth he can noight ende,
Til deth of him have mad an ende.
(see –hiede qRR two couplets after)

ESE (1)

2.3183-4 RR ese – Genius speaks on envy just before Constantine & Sylvester (twice
used aweie RR)
So fain he wolde another ese.
Wherof, mi sone, for thin ese
Now herkne a tale which I rede,
And understand it wele, I rede.

ESE / DESESE (2 selected qRR)

4.3571-2 qRR ese / desese – Iphis' last speech; Iphis and Araxarathen
Ha, thou mi wofull ladi diere,
Which duellest with thi fader hiere
And slepest in thi bedd at ese,
Thou wost nothing of my desese,
Hou thou and I be now unmete.
Ha lord, what swevene schalt thou mete,
What dremes hast thou nou on honde?

2.165-6 qRR ese / desese – Poliphemus
Fulild of sorghe and gret desese,
That he syh Acis wel at ese.

FACE / DEFACE (1 qRR)

8.2827-8 qRR face / deface – Amans / Gower as old man
Mi chiekes thinne, and al my face
With elde I myhte se deface

FALLE (5)

3.1395-6 RR falle – Pyramus and Thisbe
So as fortune scholde falle,
For feere and let hire wympel falle

5.625-626 RR falle – Amans
Befor this time hou it is falle,
Wherof ther mihte ensample falle
To suche men as be jelous . . .

5.4903-4 RR falle – Adrian and Bardus
Bot it was tho per chance falle,
Into that pet was also falle,
An ape . . .

7.3261-2 RR falle – Pompeius and the King of Armenia; 2RR and 3qRR in passage
God is himself the champion,
Whos strengthe mai no man withstonde.
Forevere yit it hath so stonde,
That God a tirant overladde.
Bot wher Pite' the regne ladde,
Ther mihte no fortune laste
Which was grevous, bot ate laste
The God himself it hath redresced.
Pite' is thilke vertu blessed

Which nevere let his maister falle;
Bot crualte', thogh it so falle
That it mai regne for a throwe,
God wole it schal ben overthrowe.

8.2017-8 RR falle – Genius; on lust, following Apollonious
To se love agein kinde falle,
For that makth sore a man to falle,
As thou myht of tofore rede.
Forthi, my sone, I wolde rede
To lete al other love aweie,
Bot if it be thurgh such a weie
As love and resoun wolde acorde.
For elles, if that thou descorde . . .

FALLE / BEFALLE (6)

1.209-210 qRR falle / befalle – Genius
“What thou er this for loves sake
Hast felt, let nothing be forsake,
Tell pleinliche as it is befalle.”
And with that word I gan doun falle

3.1325-6 qRR falle / befalle – Genius; adds sententiousness to his discourse
That thei fro mannes reson falle;
Bot whan that it is so befalle . . .

3.1619-1620 qRR falle / befalle – Genius
Ther mihte mochel thing befalle,
That scholde make a man to falle

5.5707-8 qRR falle / befalle – Tereus, Procne, Philomela
Whanne al this meschief was befalle,
This Tereus – that foule him falle! –
Unto his contre' hom he tyh

5.5787-8 qRR falle / befalle – Tereus, Procne, Philomela
And what meschief ther is befalle.
In swone tho sche gan doun falle . . .
Of wofull auntres that befelle:
Thes sostres, that ben bothe felle
(And that was noight on hem along,
Bot onliche on the grete wrong
Which Tereus hem hadde do),
Thei schopen for to venge hem tho.

8.251-2 qRR falle / befallē – Genius
Lo thus, my sone, as I thee seie,
Thou miht thiselwe be beseie
Of that thou hast of othre herd.
For evere yit it hath so ferd,
Of loves lust if so befallē
That it in other place falle
Than it is of the lawe set,
He which his love hath so beset . . .

FAILE (4)

Pro1.1031-1032 RR falle – Gower
And tokne whan the world schal faile
For so seith Crist withoute faile

8.413-414 RR faile – Antiochus speaks; Tale of Apollonius
Of his ansuere and if he faile,
He schal be ded withoute faile.

8.901-902 RR faile – Princess of Pentapolis speaks; Tale of Apollonius
And certes if I of him faile,
I wot riht wel withoute faile

8.1215-1216 RR faile – Cerymon speaks; Tale of Apollonius
And seith, “Ma dame, yee ben hiere
Wher yee be sauf, as yee schal hiere
Hierafterward; forthi as nou
Mi conseil is, conforteth you:
For trusteth wel withoute faile,
Ther is nothing which schal you faile

FARE (6)

1.2291-2292 RR fare – Narcissus
It fell him on a dai par chance,
That he in all his proude fare
Unto the forest gan to fare. . .

5.1987-1988 RR fare – Genius; on covetousness, which stands out of all sorts
Of resonable mannes fare. [doings]
Wher he pourposeth him to fare

5.7457-7458 RR fare – Tale of Paris and Helen

Whan that sche wiste of this viage,
Hou Paris schal to Grece fare,
No womman mihte worse fare
Ne sorwe more than sche dede

7.2981-2982 RR fare – Lycurgus as speaker; Tale of Lycurgus; this tale has five RR couplets in 100 lines
[with new leader]
Athenis schal the betre fare.
Bot ferst, er that I thider fare

8.1555-1556 RR fare – Apollonious
And told hem ek hou he hath fare,
Whil he was out of londe fare

8.2163-2164 RR fare – Amans / Gower; on Genius' lack of empathy
Of that he seth an other fare, [About what he sees]
Bot if he knewe himself the fare [condition]

FARE / FORFARE (1)

1.109-110 qRR forfare/fare – Amans
Bot as it were a man forfare
Unto the wode I gan to fare

FARE / MISFARE

6.527-8 qRR fare / misfare – Marriage of Pirithous
Bot only to her drunke fare,
Which many a man hath mad misfare

FASTE (6)

1.473-474 RR faste – Aspidis the Serpent
Unto the ground, and halt it faste,
And ek that other ere als faste

5.81-2 RR faste – Amans in major RR speech
And in this wise, taketh kepe,
If I hire hadde, I wolde hire kepe;
And yit no Friday wolde I faste,
Thogh I hire kepte and hielde faste.
Fy on the bagges in the kiste!
I hadde ynogh, if I hire kiste.
For certes, if sche were myn,

I hadde hir levere than a myn
Of gold. For al this worldes riche
Ne mihte make me so riche
As sche, that is so inly good.
I sette noght of other good,
For mihte I gete such a thing,
I hadde a tresor for a king;
And thogh I wolde it faste holde,
I were thanne wel beholde.

5.151-2 RR faste – Midas
. . . a cherl him hente
With strengthe of other felaschipe,
So that upon his drunkeschipe
Thei bounden him with chenes faste,
And forth thei ladde him als so faste
Unto the king, which hihte Myde.

6.759-60 RR faste – Amans on Delicacy, when he sees his lady
Min yhe, which is loth to faste,
Beginth to hungre anon so faste . . .

6.809-810 RR faste – Amans on Delicacy, when he is parted from her sight
Min yhe wolde, as thogh he faste,
Ben hungerstorven al so faste . . .
ravenous eye, like a mouth

6.1681-2 RR faste – Ulysses and Telegonus
Bot he go fro the gate faste,
Thei wolde him take and sette faste.

FELL (1)

3.2655-2656 RR fell – Telaphus and Teucer
As he [Achilles] that was cruel and fell, [wicked]
With swerd in honde on him he fell

FELL / BEFELL (3)

2.1759-1760 qRR fell / befell – Demetrius and Perseus
So sodeinliche down he fell.
In thilke time it so befell. . .

5.3815-6 qRR fell / befell – Jason and Medea
Of this and that, hou it befell,

What that he wan the schepes fell. [fleece]

5.5313-4 qRR fell / befell – Theseus and Ariadne
In thilke yeer, as it befell,
The lot upon his chance fell

FELLE (1)

8.33-34 RR felle – Genius on the fall and creation; see also befalle / falle for Lucifer's fall, 21-22
Whan thei out fro the blisse felle,
He thoght to restore, and felle

FORGE (2)

1.1087-1088 RR forge – Trojan Horse
An hors of bras thei let do forge,
Of such entaile, of such a forge

5.963-964 RR forge – Genius; on the Greek Religion, on Vulcan, a smith
With Jupiter, which in his forge
Diverse thinges made him forge

FORME (1)

7.213-214 RR forme – Genius on Four-Fold Creation
These othre thinges make and forme.
For yit withouten eny forme
Was that matiere universal. . . These elementz ben mad and formed

-FORME (22 qRR with *-forme*)

2.301-302 qRR forme / enforme – Travelers and the Angel
This angel, which him scholde enforme,
Was clothed in a mannes forme

2.1877-8 qRR forme / enforme – Demetrius and Perseus, last couplet
Wherof the matiere and the forme
Now herkne and I thee schal enforme.

2.559-560 qRR forme / misenforme – Genius on envy
[Amans shd not]
. . . thi ladi misenforme.
For whan sche knoweth al the forme,
How that thiself art envious,

Thou schalt nocht be so gracious. . .

2.2499-2500 qRR forme / enforme – Geta and Amphitrión, last couplet as Genius changes tales

Unto thin ere I thenke enforme.
Now herkne, for this is the forme.

2.2885-6 qRR forme / enforme – Pope Boniface

This clerke, whan he hath herd the forme
How he the pope scholde enforme

2.343-4 qRR forme / reforme – Constantine and Sylvester; emperor speaks after hearing crying children who do not want their blood shed for him; speaks of equality of fate; Christ rose

And riht so in the same forme
In fleissh and blod He schal reforme
emperor is re-formed

3.1731-2 qRR forme / enforme – Amans responds to Genius' discussion of Daphne; his lady is not a tree he says

No tre, bot halt hire oghne forme,
Ther mai me no man so enforme,
To whether part fortune wende. . .

3.1753-4 qRR forme / enforme – Genius responds to Amans' forme / enforme

Mi sone, that thou miht enforme
Thi pacience upon the forme
Of olde ensamples . . . [he'll tell another tale]
To Amans, forme is physical; to Genius, it is the tale itself

4.547-8 qRR forme / enforme – Genius on forgetfulness

Hath remembrance of thilke forme
Wherof he scholde his wit enforme

4.923-4 qRR forme / enforme – Amans on negligence

Of hem that conne best enforme
To knowe and witen al the forme
What faileth unto loves craft.

4.3049-3050 qRR forme / transforme – Ceix and Alceone

Is Panthasas, which may transforme
Of everything the rihte forme.

4.3109-3110 qRR forme / conforme – Ceix and Alceone

Sche fondeth in hire briddes forme,

If that sche mihte hirsself conforme
To do the plesance of a wif [[three times in one tale]]

5.941-942 qRR forme/ transforme – Genius on Greek Religion, on Mercury
That whanne he wolde hirsself transforme,
Fulofte time he tok the forme
Of womman and his oghne lefte

5.2879-80 qRR forme / enforme – Genius on perjury
Where as thei tuo the poeple enforme;
For thei kepe evere o maner forme

5.3501-2 qRR forme / enforme – Jason and Medea
And gan fro point to point enforme
Of his bataile and al the forme [conflict; details]

5.6675-6 qRR forme / transforme – Amans on stealing and stealth
. . . I wisse that I were. . . Nectanabus. . . Protheus. . . [who could. . .]
Riht as hem liste, hemsself transforme.
For if I were of such a forme. . .

6.2063-4 qRR forme / transforme – Nectanabus; shape-shifting power
He put him out of mannes like,
And of a dragon tok the forme,
As he which wolde him al conforme

6.2199-2200 Nectanabus
And sodeinly his lothly forme
Into an egle he gan transforme

7.341-2 qRR forme / conforme – Genius on the Four Elements
Bot it is of another forme;
Wherof, if that I schal conforme. . .

7.495-6 qRR forme / enforme – Genius; Four Servants of the Heart
Bot as the clerkes our enforme,
That lich to God it hath a forme

7.1181-2 qRR forme / enforme – Genius; Twelve Signs of Zodiac
Decembre after the yeeres forme,
So as the bokes ous enforme. . .

7.1637-8 qRR forme / enforme – Genius; Rhetoric
His argument in such a forme,
Which mai the pleine trouthe enforme. . .

FORMED (3 qRR on *-formed*; not complete list)

2.607-8 qRR *enformed* / *conformed* – Constance

And over that in such a wise
Sche hath hem with hire wordes wise
Of Cristes feith so full *enformed*,
That thei therto ben all *conformed*

3.373-4 qRR *transformed* / *formed* – Tiresias and the snakes

And for he hath *destourbed kinde*
And was so to nature *unkinde*,
Unkindeliche he was *transformed*,
That he which erst a man was *formed*
Into a womman was *forschape*

4.2945-6 qRR *forme* / *transforme* – Ceix and Alceone

So that he mihte be *reformed*
Of that he hadde be *transformed*. . .
As he which wolde go be *schipe*;
And for to don him *felaschipe*
His wif. . .

FOUNDE (1)

2.3475-6 RR *founde*; Constantine and Sylvester

This emperour, which hele hath *founde*,
Withinne Rome anon let *founde*
Tuo *cherches*. . .[and gave them his possession]
Of *lordschipe* and of *worldes good*.
Bot how so that his will was good. . .
[happy ending is problematic theologically]

FULL (2 selected qRR on *-full*)

2.933-4 qRR *full* / *joiefull* – Constance's son Moris; play with sone AND full

And of a sone bore *full*,
Wherof that sche was *joiefull*,
Sche was delivered *sauf* and *sone*.

5.349-350 qRR *full* / *wonderfull* – Midas

Avarice in *unquenchable*:
Is as the helle *wonderfull*.
For it mai nevermore be *full* . . .

A FYRE / AFYRE (1)

2.149-150 broken RR afyre / a fyre – Acis and Galatea
That al his herte hath set afyre
Of pure Envie: and as a fyre. . .

A FYRE / FYRE (1 qRR)

8.2775-2776 qRR fyre / afyre – Amans encounters Cupid
Whil ther is oyle for to fyre,
The lampe is lyhtly set afyre

GATE (2)

5.3329-30 RR gate – Jason and Medea
be the hond Jason he hente,
And that was ate paleis gate,
So fer the king cam on his gate
Toward Jason to don him chiere

6.1007-8 RR gate – Dives and Lazarus
Thus lai this povere in gret destresse
Acold and hungred ate gate,
Fro which he mihte go no gate, [way]
So was he wofulli besein.
And as these holi bokes sein. . .

GET / FORGET (4)

1.223-224 qRR gete / forgete – Amans
That I ne may my wittes gete,
So schal I moche thing forgete

2.1813-1814 qRR gete / forgete – Demetrius and Perseus
And how he hadde his regne gete.
Bot he hath al the riht forgete

4.575-6 qRR gete / forgete – Amans on forgetfulness
So that for feere I can nocht gete
Mi witt, bot I miself forgete. . .

5.69-70 qRR gete / forgete – Amans, just before his 6RR speech
If I that tresor mihte gete,
It scholde nevere be forgete . . .

GLAD / UNGLAD (1)

3.45-46 qRR glad / unglad – Amans
With othre men, I am nocht glad;
Bot I am wel the more unglad

GLAD / GLADE (not RR; adjacent couplets that play off same word)

8.1318-9 glade / glad – Tale of Apollonius
Was nevere yit in no cité
Such joie mad as thei tho made;
His herte also began to glade
Of that he sih the poeple glad.
Lo, thus fortune his hap hath lad

GLOSE (1)

7.2171-2 RR glose – Genius on Flattery (3RR in speech)
. . . flaterie,
Which many a worthi king deceiveth,
Er he the fallas aperceiveth [false, becomes aware of]
Of hem that serven to the glose. [flattery]
For thei that cunnen plese and glose, [flatter]
Ben. . . norrices [nurses]

GOOD (7)

2.3481-3482 RR good; Constantine and Sylvester
This emperour, which hele hath founde,
Withinne Rome anon let founde
Tuo cherches. . . [and gave them his possession]
Of lordschipe and of worldes good.
Bot how so that his will was good. . .
[happy ending is problematic theologically]

4.2283-2284 RR good – Genius' reply to Amans (see seche); sententious lore
For sielde it is that love alloweth
The gentil man withoute good,
Thogh his condicion be good. [moral condition]

5.89-90 RR good – Amans in major RR speech
And in this wise, taketh kepe,
If I hire hadde, I wolde hire kepe;
And yit no Friday wolde I faste,
Thogh I hire kepte and hielde faste.

Fy on the bagges in the kiste!
I hadde ynogh, if I hire kiste.
For certes, if sche were myn,
I hadde hir levere than a myn
Of gold. For al this worldes riche
Ne mihte make me so riche
As sche, that is so inly good.
I sette noght of other good

5.4703-4704 RR good – Genius on Avarice; five couplets echo rhyme words

Him thenkth on his unkindeschipe
That him nedeth no felaschipe.
Be so the bagge and he acorden,
Him reccheth noght what men recorden
Of him, or it be evel or good.
For al his trust is on his good,
So that alone he falleth ofte,
Whan he best weneth stonde alofte,
Als wel in love as other wise;
For love is evere of som reprise
To him that wole his love holde.
Forthi, mi sone, as thou art holde,
Thouchende of this tell me thi schrift. . .

5.6345-6346 RR good – Genius after Calistona; plus 3 qRR on *weie, hiede, stonde*

And nameliche of thilke good
Which every womman that is good
Desireth. . .

7.87-88 RR good – Genius on Theology

. . .God the ferste cause,
Which of Himself is thilke good,
Whithoute whom nothing is good

7.3925-3926 RR good - Solomon's Wisdom; 3RR in short passage (see believe, regne)

a good king's name is praised
For most above all ertli good,
Wher that a king himself is good
It helpeth. . .

GOODE (2)

Prol.237-238 RR goode
The feith of Crist and alle goode
Thurgh hem that thanne weren goode

7.1549-1550 RR goode – Rhetoric; the power of the word in all contexts
Wher so it be to evele or goode.
For if the wordes semen goode. . [can then deceive]

GOODE / UNGOODE (1)

8.239-240 qRR goode – Genius on Lot
For that the stockes were ungoode,
The branches mihten nocht be goode

GROUNDE (1)

3.3-4 RR grounde – Genius
If thou the vices lest to knowe,
Mi sone, it hath nocht ben unknowe,
Fro ferst that men the swerdes grounde,
That ther nis on upon this grounde,
A vice forein fro the lawe,
Wherof that many a good felawe
Hath be destraght be sodein chance.

GUILE / BEGUILE (1)

6.1379-80 qRR guile / beguile – Genius on sorcery; sententious repetition
For often he that wol beguile
Is guiled with the same guile,
And thus the guilour is beguiled.

HALF / GODDESHALF (2)

5.4451-2 broken RR goddeshalf / half – Amans's to Genius on usury in love
And if myn happ were so wel went,
That for the hole I mihte have half,
Me thenkth I were a goddes half. [on God's side (i.e., I shd be content)]

5.5015-5016 broken RR goddeshalf / half – Adrian and Bardus; Adrian and Bardus
share RR

"I am," quod Adrian, "the same,
Whos good thou schalt have evene half."
Quod Bardus, "Thanne a Goddes half [on God's behalf]
The thridde time assaie I schal."

HASTE (3)

2.1541-1542 RR haste – Constance
To preie him that he wolde haste;
And he cam forth in alle haste

3.1937-1938 RR haste – Orestes
And for that cause in alle haste
Out of the lond he gan him haste

6.1749-1750 RR haste – Ulysses and Telegonus; notice anaphora following this
passage
After his other sone in faste
He send, and he began him haste

HELE (5)

Prol. 397-398 RR hele
Thei usen now, wherof the hele
Thei hurte of that thei scholden hele

3.2755-2756 RR hele, plus 3.2751-2752 RR leve – TWICE mixed speakers in this
passage at end of book 3
“Mi sone, er we departe atwinne,
I schal behinde nothing leve.”
“Mi goode fader, be your leve. . . A trusts C
As ye that be my soul hele, [soul’s health]
That ye fro me wol nothing hele [conceal]. . .
“Mi sone, art thou coupable of Slowthe
In eny point which to him longeth?”
“My fader, of tho pointz me longeth
To wite plainly what thei meene. . .

8.2745-2746 RR hele – Amans encountering Cupid (see *presse* just below it)
Cupido, which may hurte and hele
In loves cause, as for myn hele [health]

8.3155-8.3156 RR hele – Gower’s prayer; end of poem, TRIPLET with *more, hele*
[Debat] Withinne himself, and can nought leve.
And thus forthy my final leve
I take now for evere more
Withoute makynge any more
Of love and of his dedly hele,
Which no phisicien can hele.

8.3091v-3092v RR hele – Amans / Gower; TRIPLET from first-recension

Whan game is beste, is best to leve:
And thus forthi my fynal leve,
Withoute makyng eny moore,
I take now for evere moore
Of love and of his dedly heele,
Which no phisicien can heele.

HELPE (5)

5.1035-1036 RR helpe – Genius; on the Greek Religion, on Pan (euhemerism)
To every craft for mannes helpe
He hadde a redi wit to helpe
Thurgh naturel experience.

5.2425-2426 RR helpe – Beggars and the Two Pasties; peasant tells the moral in a RR
couplet (also see *riche*)
“Nou have I certainly conceived
That he mai lihtly be deceived,
That tristeth unto mannes helpe;
Bot wel is him whom God wol helpe. . .”

5.3487-3488 RR helpe – Jason and Medea
Jason swor. . .
That also wiss god scholde him helpe,
That if Medea dede him helpe. . .[she would be his wife]

7.3645-3646 RR helpe – Gideon
Bot He which alle thing mai helpe,
Wher that ther lacketh mannes helpe. . .[God sent angel]

8.2250-2251 RR helpe – Amans’ rime royal prayer to Venus
As preie unto mi lady eny helpe
Thus wot I noght wherof miself to helpe.

HERE (1) [see also *hiere*]

6.747-8 RR here – Amans on Delicacy (see also *faste*)
Amother is of that I here,
The thridde, as I schal tellen here

HERTE / SCHERTE (2 qRR)

2.2243-4 qRR herte / scherte – Hercules, Deianyre, Nessus
He tok to Deianyre his scherte,
Which with the blod was of his herte

2.2279-80 qRR herte / scherte – Hercules, Deianyre, Nessus
With wepende yhe and woful herte
Sche tok out the unhappi scherte

HEWE (1)

2.403-404 RR hewe – Genius regarding envy's lies
The freisshe rede roses brenneth
And makth hem fade and pale of hewe,
Riht so this fals envious hewe. . .
He torneth preising into blame. . .

-HIEDE (18 qRR on *-hiede*)

1.1211-1212 qRR hiede / manhiede – Genius
It sit thee wel to taken hiede
That thou eschue of thi manhiede

1.3043-3044 qRR hiede / manhiede – Genius, after Nebuchadnezzar's vainglorious
punishment
Forthi, my sone, tak good hiede
So for to lede thi manhiede

3.2523-2524 qRR Godhiede / hiede – Genius on homicide
He is mad lich to the Godhiede.
So sit it wel to taken hiede

8.2623-4 qRR hiede / wommanhiede – Amans recounts the dance of lovers
. . .hir wommanhiede,
That al the world therof tok hiede

4.2305-6 qRR hiede / wommanhiede – Genius to Amans; six RR couplets in this
speech
. . .prouesse
Is caused upon loves reule
To him that can manhode reule;
And ek toward the wommanhiede,
Who that therof wol taken hiede. . .

4.3533-4 qRR hiede / wommanhiede – Iphis and Araxarathen
And as sche scholde, tok good hiede
To save and kepe hir wommanhiede.

5.533-4 qRR hiede / wommanhiede – Genius; the Jelous takth non hiede

Bot al honour and wommanhiede,
Therof the Jelous takth non hiede

5.2583-4 qRR hiede/wommanhiede – Amans
Than mai he knowe and taken hiede
That al the lust of wommanhiede

5.2985-6 qRR hiede / wommanhiede – Achilles and Deidamia
Which longeth unto wommanhiede.
And he was yong and tok non hiede

5.3387-8 qRR hiede / wommanhiede – Jason and Medea
With al that fell to wommanhiede.
Thus ech of other token hiede

5.3531-2 qRR hiede / hastihiede – Jason and Medea
Of hem is noght to taken hiede,
For ech of hem in hastihiede

5.4755-6 qRR frendlihiede / wommanhiede – Amans
That as be weie of frendlihiede
Sche can so kepe hir wommanhiede

5.5955-6 qRR maidenhiede / wommanhiede – Tereus; metamorphosis of Philomela
Whan that sche loste hir maidenhiede.
Forevere upon hir wommanhiede

5.6181-2 qRR maidenhed / wommanhede – Neptune and Cornix
And cleped is the maidenhede,
Which is the flour of wommanhede

5.6327-8 qRR hiede / wommanhiede – Calistona; wommanhiede / [her son Archas]
tok non hiede
As thogh sche were in wommanhiede,
Toward him cam, and tok non hiede

5.6351-2 qRR hiede / wommanhiede – Genius
Of old ensample taken hiede,
Hou that the flour of maidenhiede . . .

7.1877-8 qRR manhede / wommanhede – Truth: Esdras on the King, Women, and
Truth / manhede/wommanhede
And ek he seide hou that manhede
Thurgh strengthe unto the wommanhede

7.4255-6 qRR manhede / wommanhede – Genius on Chastity
Er that he felle in such riote,
And namely that he n’assote
To change for the wommanhede
The worthinesse of his manhede

HIERE (26)

1.233-4 RR hierie – Genius to Amans
Thi schrifte to oppose and hierie,
Mi sone, I am assigned hierie

1.531-2 RR hierie – Genius after Siren story
Thou myht ensample taken hierie,
As I have told, and what thou hierie
Bel wel war. . .
For if thou woldest take kepe
And wisly cowthest warde and kepe. . .
But if thou cowthest sette in reule
Tho tuo, the thre were eth to reule

1.3319-20 RR hierie – Three Questions; Peronelle speaks to the king
Ordeigne for mi fader hierie,
That after this, whan men it hierie . . .

2.1411-2 RR hierie – Constance, Allee sees her again
It were a wonder for to hierie.
For he was nouthur ther ne hierie

3.1881-2 RR hierie – Genius introducing tale of Orestes
Which is gret pité for to hierie,
I thenke for to tellen hierie,
That thou such moerdre miht withstonde,
What thou the tale hast understonde.

4.1225-6 RR hierie – Genius on idleness
Mi sone, bot thou telle wilt
Oght elles than I mai now hierie,
Thou schalt have no penance hierie.

4.1369-70 RR hierie – Tale of Rosiphelee; Rosiphelee speaks
Rosiphelee sees marvelous riders and asks who they are:
And seide, “Ha, suster, let me hierie,
What ben thei that now riden hierie,
And ben so richeliche arraied?”

4.2243-2244 RR hierē – Genius to Amans, on the rich and the poor
I not of hem which hath the lasse
Of worldes good, bot as of charge
The lord is more for to charge, [be held responsible]
Whan God schal his accompte hierē, [hear]
For he hath had hise lustes hierē. [pleasures here]

4.2633-4 RR hierē – Genius on Three Philosophers' Stones
Bot toward oure marches hierē, [regions here]
Of the Latins if thou wolt hierē

4.3141-3142 RR hierē – Amans to Genius
Al this that I have seid you hierē
Of my wakinge, as ye mai hierē,
It toucheth to my lady swete.

5.1321-2 RR hierē – Genius on Greek Religion; Greeks like bestes, honoring men not
God
Whil that thei were alyve hierē.
And over this, as thou schalt hierē. . .

5.2779-80 RR hierē – King and Steward's Wife
steward and narrator share this RR; storyteller's ornament
“Whan I hire fette to you hierē.”
The king his tale wol noght hierē

5.4259-60 RR hierē – Phrixus and Helle, relating the queen's death
Bot for ther mai no mannes lif
Endure upon this erthe hierē,
This worthy queene, as thou miht hierē. . .

5.4435-6 RR hierē – first couplet in Amans's reply to Genius' question, if he uses
usury in love
Mi fader, nay, for ought I hierē.
For of tho pointz ye tolden hierē

5.4487-8 RR hierē – later in same speech of Amans's on usury in love
To you, mi fader, that ben hierē
Min hole schrifte for to hierē

5.5445-6 RR hierē – Theseus and Ariadne; Ariadne is the speaker of this RR couplet
“Ha lord,” sche seide, “which a senne, [sin]
As al the world schal after hierē,
Upon this woful womman hierē

This worthi kniht hath don and wrought! . . .”

5.5857-8 RR hierie - Tereus, Procne, Philomela; Procne as speaker to Apollo in prayer
O lord, that gifst the lives fode
To every wyht, I prei thee hierie
Thes wofull sostres that ben hierie

5.6403v-4v RR hierie – Genius
A man to live chaste hierie:
And natheles a man mai hierie

6.1091-2 RR hierie – Dives and Lazarus; Abraham answered Lazarus’s request in the
negative, says how everyday
His brethren mihten knowe and hierie
Of Moises on erthe hierie

6.1877-8 RR hierie – Nectanabus, Nectanabus as speaker to lady
To you and in message I cam,
The which I mai nocht tellen hierie;
Bot if it liketh you to hierie,
It mot be seid al prively. . .”

7.309-10 RR hierie – Genius; Four Elements
The thonderstrok er that men hierie:
So mai it wel be proeved hierie

7.3039-40 RR hierie – First Lawgivers
And in this wise double mede
Resceiven thei that don wel hierie;
Wherof if that thee list to hierie. . .

7.4817-8 RR hierie – Lucrece; Lucrece as speaker
Nou wolde God I hadde him hierie;
For certes til that I mai hierie

8.269-270 RR – Genius, last couplet before Tale of Apollonius
Which is a long process to hierie,
I thenke for to tellen hierie

8.1211-2 RR hierie – Tale of Apollonius; Cerymon is speaker
And seith, “Ma dame, yee ben hierie
Wher yee be sauf, as yee schal hierie
Hierafterward; forthi as nou
Mi conseil is, conforteth you: [take comfort]
For trusteth wel withoute faile,

There is nothing which schal you faile” [be lacking for you]

8.3055-6 RR hierie – Gower’s prayer
There is a stat, as ye schul hierie,
Above alle othre on erthe hierie

-HODE (6 selected qRR on *-hode*)

2.793-794 qRR childhode / manhode – Constance
[Elda’s knight] whom fro childhode
He hadde updrawe into manhode

2.1639-1640 qRR knighthode / manhode – Demetrius and Perseus
Thurgh mihty hond of his manhode,
As he which hath ynowh knighthode

2.2513-4 qRR knythode / manhode – False Bachelor
Whos herte stod upon knythode.
Bot most of alle of his manhode

4.1879-1880 qRR knythode / manhode – Nauplus and Ulysses
And leve of armes the knythode,
Which is the pris of thi manhode [excellence]

5.455-6 qRR manhode / wifhode – Genius defines jealousy as a man’s lack of courtesy
to his wife
Among the men lacke of manhode
In mariage upon wifhode
Makth that a man himself deceiveth. . .

5.7337-8 qRR knythode / manhode – Paris and Helen; Hector as speaker
Stant nou in Grece the manhode
Of worthinesse and of knighthode

HOL (1)

8.1257-1258 RR hol – Apollonius; princess of Pentapolis
Til time com that sche was hol; [well]
And tho thei take her conseil hol [whole]

HOLDE (6)

1.1715-1716 RR holde – Tale of Florent
His youthe schal be cast aweie
Upon such on which as the weie

Is old and lothly overal.
Bot nede he mot that nede schal:
He wolde algate his trowthe holde,
As every knyht therto is holde,
What happ so evere him is befallē,
Thogh sche be the fouleste of alle,
Yet to t'honour of womanhiede
Him thoghte he scholde taken hiede

3.837-838 RR holde – Amans following tale of Jupiter and Laar
all is true

That ye me teche, and I wol holde,
The reule to which I am holde. . .

4.1553-1554 RR holde – Jephthah's Daughter
daughter comforts father:

Conforteth him, and bad him holde
The covenant which he is holde

5.4709-4710 RR holde – Genius on Avarice; five couplets echo rhyme words

Him thenkth on his unkindeschipe
That him nedeth no felaschipe.
Be so the bagge and he acorden,
Him reccheth noght what men recorden
Of him, or it be evel or good.
For al his trust is on his good,
So that alone he falleth ofte,
Whan he best weneth stonde alofte,
Als wel in love as other wise;
For love is evere of som reprise
To him that wole his love holde.
Forthi, mi sone, as thou art holde,
Thouchende of this tell me thi schrift. . .

7.2911-2912 RR holde – Cambyses

I finde a tale write also,
Hou that a worthi prince is holde
The lawes of his lond to holde. . .

7.3069-3070 RR holde – First Lawgivers

God lieve it mote wel ben holde,
As every king therto is holde

-HOLDE (1 sample qRR)

1.261-2 qRR holde / withhold – Amans
I must folwe, as I am holde,
For I with love am al withholde

HOTE (15)

2.131-2 RR hote – Acis and Galatea
For gifte ne for no beheste,
That sche ne was al at his heste.
This yonge knyht Acis was hote,
Which hire ageinward als so hote
Al only loveth and no mo.

3.21-2 RR hote – Genius on wrath
That in oure Englisshe Wrathe is hote,
Which hath his wordes ay so hote

3.1375-6 RR hote – Pyramus and Thisbe
And he whom that sche loveth hote
Was Piramus be name hote

4.87-88 RR hote – Aeneas and Dido
. . .and Dido sche was hote,
Which loveth Eneas so hote

4.979-80 RR hote – Phebus and Daphne, opening couplet
Phebus, which is the sonne hote,
That schyneth upon the erthe hote. . .

4.2483-4 RR hote – Genius on Alchemists
third sulfur, the forth:
Arcennicum be name hote.
With blowinge and with fyres hote. . .
Thei werchen. . .

5.2865-6 RR hote – Genius on perjury; introduces Falswitness, ready to witness
What thing his maister wol him hote. [command]
Perjurie is the secoude hote. . .

5.4617-8 RR hote – Tale of Echo
For Juno with hire wordes hote,
This maiden, which Echo was hote,
Reproveth and seith in this wise. . .with that word sche was forschape
Juno transforms Echo; forces her to echo words; hote words; Echo herself is hote or
commanded to echo

Strange to introduce Echo's name at this moment of metamorphosis; to keep the RR;
tongue and bell-clapper

5.6817-8 RR hote – Hercules and Faunus
Hercules and girlfriend find a cave Eolen
Be name and Thophis it was hote.
The sonne schon tho wonder hote

6.627-8 RR hote – Genius on Delicacy
Sufficeth to the metes hote.
Wherof this lusti vice is hote
Of Gule the Delicacie

6.913-4 RR hote – Amans on Delicacy
This lusti cokes name is hote
Thought, which hath evere hise pottes hote
Of love. . .

7.431-2 RR hote – Genius; Four Complexions
Which in a man is Colre hote,
Whos propretes ben dreie and hote
appropriate RR hot and coler

7.853-4 RR hote – Seven Planets
Eritheus the ferste is hote,
The which is red and schyneth hote
four horses for hot sun

7.1067-8 RR hote – Twelve Signs (Leo)
The monthe of Juin unto this signe
Thou schalt after the reule assigne.
The fifte signe is Leo hote,
Whos kinde is schape dreie and hote,
In whom the sonne hath herbergage [lodging; see note]

8.2621-2 RR hote – Amans recounts the dance of lovers
Penolope that on was hote,
Whom many a knyht hath loved hote
. . .hir wommanhiede,
That al the world therof tok hiede

HOTE / BEHOTE (7)

1.1233-1234 qRR behote / hote - Genius
The point seconde, I thee behote,

Which Inobedience is hote.

1.2575-6 qRR behote/hote – Albinus and Rosemund

This mayde Glodeside is hote,
To whom this lady hath behote
. . .[revenge on the man]
Thei schope among hem such a wyle,
The king was ded withinne a whyle. . .
And with a certain felaschipe
Thei fledde and wente away be schipe. . .

1.2677-7 qRR hote / behote – Genius between Albinus and next section

This vice veine gloire is hote,
Wherof, my sone, I thee behote
To trete and speke in such a wise,
That thou thee myht the betre advise.”

4.793-4 qRR behote/hote – Demophon and Phyllis

The trowthe which he hath behote,
Wherof sche loveth him so hote,
Sche seith. . .

4.1823-4 qRR behote/hote – Nauplus and Ulysses

Anon upon Penolope
His wif, whom that he loveth hote, [passionately]
Thenkende, wolde hem nocht behote. [he wldnt promise them that he wldnt go]

4.2541-2 qRR hote / behote – Genius on Three Philosopher’s Stones

The ston seconde I thee behote
Is lapis animalis hote

5.5193-4 qRR hote / behote – Amans

And love hir evere aliche hote,
That nouter give ne behote

HYE / HYHE (1)

5.3995-6 Jason and Medea

. . .faste gan hire hye,
And there upon the hulles hyhe..

IN (3)

7.4919-4920 RR in – Lucrece

He rod. . .

Tofore Collantines in,
And al frendliche he goth him in. . .

8.1169-1170 RR in – Apollonius
He peiseth ther was somewhat in, [feels by weight]
And bad hem bere it to his in [them bear; residence]

8.1285-1286 RR in – Tale of Apollonius
He made hem chiere, and to his in,
Wher he whilom sojourned in. . .

IS (1)

7.1647-1648 RR is – Genius on Practice
and nou I wolde
Telle of the thridde what it is,
The which Practique cleped is.

JUGGE (1)

7.2905-2906 RR jugge – Cambyses
Thus is defalte of other jugge
The king mot otherwhile jugge,
To holden up the rihte lawe.

KEPE (14)

Prol. 179-180 RR kepe
And yet ne take men no kepe.
Bot thilke Lord which al may kepe,

1.441-442 RR kepe – Genius following Medusa story
Bot if he wel his yhe kepe
And take of fol delit no kepe

1.535-6 kepe; 531-2 RR hier; 543-4 reule – Genius after Siren story
Thou myht ensample taken hier,
As I have told, and what thou hier
Bel wel war. . .
For if thou woldest take kepe
And wisly cowthest warde and kepe. . .
But if thou cowthest sette in reule
Tho tuo, the thre were eth to reule

1.3273-3274 RR kepe – Tale of Three Questions; Peronelle as speaker

That other point. . .
Which most is worth and most is good,
And costeth lest a man to kepe:
Mi lord, if ye woll take kepe,
I seie it is humilité

2.1659-1660 RR kepe – Demetrius and Perseus; Perseus as speaker
Towardes you I thenke kepe,
For it is good ye take kepe

2.2439-2440 RR kepe – Genius on supplantation
Be double weie take kepe.
Ferst for thin oghne astat to kepe

4.1077-1078 RR kepe – Genius to Amans will tell another example; Idleness
. . . thi diligence. . .
Be resoun scholde reule and kepe,
If that thee list to taken kepe. . .

4.1687-1688 RR kepe – Amans – labor in love and crusading
And thogh I scholde hem bothe kepe, (i.e., love and arms)
Als wel yit wolde I take kepe
Whan it were time to abide. . .

5.79-80 RR kepe – Amans in major RR speech
And in this wise, taketh kepe, [take hede]
If I hire hadde, I wolde hire kepe; [If I possessed her]
And yit no Friday wolde I faste, [abstain (from her)]
Thogh I hire kepte and hielde faste. [i.e., every day wd be a feast day]
Fy on the bagges in the kiste! [(money) bags; chest]
I hadde ynogh, if I hire kiste. [kissed]
For certes, if sche were myn,
I hadde hir levere than a myn [wd rather have her]
Of gold. For al this worldes riche [earthly kingdom]
Ne mihte make me so riche
As sche, that is so inly good.
I sette noght of other good,
For mihte I gete such a thing,
I hadde tresor for a king:
And thogh I wolde it faste holde, [tightly]
I were thanne wel beholde. [bound (obliged)]

5.127-128 RR kepe – Genius after Amans' six RR speech
Avarice, if he may get his increase
Of gold, that wole he serve and kepe,

For he takth of noght elles kepe
Bot for to fille hise bagges large

5.1047-1048 RR kepe – Genius on Greek Religion; on Dyonisius/Bachus
Jupiter sleeps with Semele, and to hide his lecherie (for shame?)
That non therof schal take kepe,
In a montaigne for to kepe,
Which Dyon hihte and was in Ynde,
He sende. . .

5.4319-4320 RR kepe – Phrixus and Helle
king believes tale; will lose both children
Unto the lond which he schal kepe,
And bad his wif to take kepe

7.3021-3022 RR kepe – Tale of Lycurgus; Lycurgus as speaker to his parliament; this
tale has five RR couplets in 100 lines
The lawes have for to kepe;
For who that wolde take kepe
Of hem that ferst the lawes founde,
Als fer as lasteth eny bounde
Of lond, here names yit ben knowe.
And if it like thee to knowe
Some of here names hou thei stonde,
Nou herkne and thou schalt understonde.

7.3073-3074 RR kepe – First Lawgivers
What king o lawe takth no kepe,
Be lawe he mai no regne kepe.

KINDE (1)

7.4297-8 RR kinde – Genius on Chastity
It sit a man be weie of kinde [by way of nature]
To love, bot it is noght kinde [natural]
A man for love his wit to lese. [lose]

-KINDE (4 sample qRR)

5.1609-1610 qRR mankinde / unkinde – Genius on Religion: The Jews, list of fresh
things after flood
Of beste, of bridd, and of mankinde,
Which evere hath be to God unkinde.

5.5197-8 qRR kinde / unkinde – Amans; on his lady

I wol noght say that sche is kinde,
And for to sai sche is unkinde

5.5423-4 qRR kinde / unkinde – Theseus and Ariadne

. . .fer from alle loves kinde.
For more than the beste unkinde
Theseus, which no trouthe kepte,
Whil that this yonge ladi slepte,
Fulfilde of his unkindeschipe
Hath al forgete the goodschipe. . .
[he takes to schipe and leaves her stranded]

5.5905-6 qRR kinde / unkinde – Tereus, Philomela, Procne

Himself [Tereus] devoureth agein kinde,
As he that was tofore unkinde

KISTE (1)

5.83-4 RR kiste – Amans in major RR speech

And in this wise, taketh kepe, [take hede]
If I hire hadde, I wolde hire kepe; [If I possessed her]
And yit no Friday wolde I faste, [abstain (from her)]
Thogh I hire kepte and hielde faste. [i.e., every day wd be a feast day]
Fy on the bagges in the kiste! [(money) bags; chest]
I hadde ynogh, if I hire kiste. [kissed]
For certes, if sche were myn,
I hadde hir levere than a myn [wd rather have her]
Of gold. For al this worldes riche [earthly kingdom]
Ne mihte make me so riche
As sche, that is so inly good.
I sette noght of other good

KNOWE (6)

2.3521-2 RR knowe – Genius, last RR of book 2 toward very end

So that thou schalt the vices knowe.
For whan thei be to thee full knowe,
Thou mihte him wel the betre eschuie.

3.2773-2774 RR knowe – final couplet of book 3, Genius ends long RR passage with two mixed speaker couplets

Make unto thi memoire knowe,
The pointz of Slowthe thou schalt knowe

4.2013-2014 RR knowe – Confessor ends Education of Achilles and begins moralizing

As it was afterward wel knowe.
Lo, thus, my sone, thou miht knowe. . .

6.475-476 RR knowe – Tristram and Isolde

In every mannes mouth it is
Hou Tristram was of love drunke
With Bele Ysolde, when thei drunke
The drink which Brangwein hem betok,
Er that king Marc his eem hire tok
To wyve, as it was after knowe.
And ek, mi sone, if thou wolt knowe,
As it hath fallen overmore
In loves cause, and what is more. . . .

6.2425-2426 RR knowe – Genius end of book 6

Genius says he knows nothing of wisdom. . .
Which is noght unto Venus knowe,
I mai it noght miselve knowe

7.3025-6– Tale of Lycurgus; this tale has five RR couplets in 100 lines

The lawes have for to kepe;
For who that wolde take kepe
Of hem that ferst the lawes founde,
Als fer as lasteth eny bounde
Of lond, here names yit ben knowe.
And if it like thee to knowe
Some of here names hou thei stonde,
Nou herkne and thou schalt understonde.

KNOWE (4 selected qRR)

3.1-2 qRR knowe / unknowe – Genius

If thou the vices lest to knowe,
Mi sone, it hath noght ben unknowe,
Fro ferst that men the swerdes grounde,
That ther nis on upon this grounde,
A vice forein fro the lawe,
Wherof that many a good felawe
Hath be destraght be sodein chance.

3.1087-1088 qRR knowe / beknowe – Genius after Namplus's Tale

As ye be youre bokes knowe,
And I the sothe schal beknowe [acknowledge]

6.1389-90 qRR knowe / beknowe – last couplet before Genius ends speech and starts tale of Ulysses and Telegonus
A tale which is good to knowe
To thee, mi sone, I schal beknowe.

7.2959-60 qRR knowe / beknowe – Tale of Lycurgus; Lycurgus speaks a *rime riche* variant to his parliament
Bot of o thing I am beknowe,
The which mi will is that ye knowe

LASTE (31)

Prol. 249-50 RR laste – Gower
For worldes good, which may noght laste.
God wot the cause to the laste

Prol. 577-8 RR laste – Gower
Stant, why no worldes thing mai laste,
Til it be drive to the laste.

Prol. 701-2 RR laste – Gower
Bot for the time thus it laste,
Til it befell that ate laste
This king, whan that his day was come,
With strengthe of deth was overcome.

Prol. 989-90 RR laste – Gower
Bot for ther is diversité
Withinne himself, he may noght laste,
That he ne deieth ate laste.

2.2883-4 RR laste – Pope Boniface; Boniface tells his clerk to use Trump of Brass against Celeste and concludes speech with *rime riche* couplet
Celeste should leave so that he can retain grace
“Of tilke worschipe ate laste
In hevене which schal evere laste.”
This clerke, whan that he hath herd the forme
How he the pope scholde enforme,
Tok of the cardinal his leve. . .

3.619-20 RR laste – Genius after Amans gives long speech; patience endures
And overcomth it at laste;
Bot he mai nevere longe laste,
Which wol noght bowe er that he breke

3.1911-2 RR laste – Orestes (also see asent/assent 1917-8)

To love there it mai nocht laste.

Bot fell to meschief ate laste. . .

4.1419-20 RR laste - tale of Rosiphelee; lady responds with *rime riche* to Rosiphelee's question on how she got that bridel:

For it no lengere mihte laste,

So nyh my lif was ate laste. [So close my life was to its end]

4.1757-8 RR laste – Amans on love and crusading

Bot thogh my besenese laste,

Al is bot ydel ate laste

4.2315-6 RR laste – Genius to Amans (6 RR in his speech); idleness

As for the while that it laste.

And thus I conclude ate laste

4.2805-2806 RR laste—Amans speaks on lady (anti-sloth speech; wakeful for lady; part of three RR within 20 lines)

Bot as it falleth ate laste,

Ther mai no worldes joie laste

4.3443-4 RR laste – Genius

For where a man is obstinat,

Wanhope folweth ate laste,

Which mai nocht after longe laste,

Til Slouthe make of him an ende.

5.279-80 RR laste – Midas, following a passage listing all the things he touches; after these metamorphoses, he has nothing to live on

The flour, the fruit, al gold it was.

Thus toucheth he, whil he mai laste

To go, bot hunger ate laste

Him tok, so that he moste nede

Be weie of kinde his hunger fede.

5.1769-70 RR laste – Genius on Religion, Christians

And soffre for mannes sake.

Thus mai no reson wel forsake

That thilke senne original

Ne was the cause in special

Of mannes worschipe ate laste,

Which schal withouten ende laste.

For be that cause the Godhede

Assembled was to the manhede. . .

5.2631-2 RR laste – Genius on covetousness of lovers, whose covetousness
Schal sore grieve him ate laste,
For such a love mai nocht laste.

5.3455-6 RR laste – Jason and Medea; Jason and narrator share RR
He seide, “Al at youre oghne wille. . .I schal treuly fulfille/
Youre heste, whil mi lif mai laste.”
Thus longe he preide, and ate laste
Sche granteth. . .

5.5171-2 RR laste – Genius to Amans
For wel behote and evele laste, [promised; evilly concluded]
That is here lif; for ate laste. . .[their love is gone]

5.6957-8 RR laste – Genius, second to last couplet before end of text section
Ther is yit on, which is the laste;
In whom ther mai no vertu laste

6.579-80 RR laste – Galba and Vitellius
Bot hou so that the dai be longe,
The derk niht comth ate laste.
God wolde nocht thei scholden laste. . .[follows w their downfall]

6.887-8 RR laste – Amans on Delicacy (major RR speech)
Hou sorwe mai nocht evere laste;
And so comth hope in ate laste,
Whan I non other fode knowe

6.1057-8 RR laste – Dives and Lazarus; Abraham as speaker addressing Dives
Dives will suffer pain. . .
In helle, which schal evere laste;
And this Lazar nou ate laste
The worldes peine is overronne. . .

7.3257-8 RR laste – Pompeius and the King of Armenia; 2RR and 3qRR in passage
God is himself the champion,
Whos strengthe mai no man withstonde.
Forevere yit it hath so stonde,
That God a tirant overladde.
Bot wher Pite’ the regne ladde,
Ther mihte no fortune laste
Which was grevous, bot ate laste
The God himself it hath redresced.

Pite' is thilke vertu blessed
Which nevere let his maister falle;
Bot crualte', thogh it so falle
That it mai regne for a throwe,
God wole it schal ben overthrowe.

7.3377-8 RR laste – Lichaon
Bot hou so that the wrong beginne
Of tirannie, it mai nocht laste,
Bot such as thei don ate laste
To othre men, such on hem falleth

7.4433-4 RR laste – Balaam
. . . withinne a litel throwe
The myht of hem was overthrowe. . .
Til Phinees the cause on honde
Hath take, this vengance laste,
Bot thanne it cessede ate laste. . .

7.4473-4 RR laste – Lecherous Solomon and Division of Kingdom
That every worthi prince is holde
Withinne himself himself beholde,
To se the stat of his persone,
And thenke hou ther be joies none
Upon this erthe mad to laste,
And hou the fleissh schal ate laste / . . . forsake

8.193-4 RR laste – Genius to Amans on sacred and ancient history
And lich unto the bitterswete;
For thogh it thenke a man ferst swete,
He schal wel fielen ate laste
That it is sour and may nocht laste

8.2783-4 RR laste – Amans encounters Cupid
And for a while so it laste,
Til that Cupide to the laste

8.2889-90 RR laste – A. after swoon; see leve a few before
And natheless as for the laste,
Whil that my wittes with me laste

8.2993-4 RR laste – Gower's Prayer
To seche and loke into the laste,
Ther may no worldes joye laste.

8.3093-4 RR laste – Gower’s Prayer; king’s pomp
No wondir is, for ate laste
He schal wel wite it mai nought laste

5.7131-2v RR laste – Genius on Sacrilege
Bot every riot ate laste
Mot nedes falle and mai nocht laste

LAWE / FELAWE (3 selected qRR)

1.1243-1244 qRR lawe / felawe – Gower
That he desdeigneth alle lawe:
He not what is to be felawe

5.1389-1390 qRR felawe / lawe – Genius on Greek Religion, on Venus
Which alle danger putte aweie
Of love, and fond to lust a weie. . .
[Neabole 1437-8] Sche was to every man felawe,
And hild the lust of thilke lawe,
Which Venus of hirself began.

5.1779-1780 Genius on Religion, Christianity
Thurgh baptesme of the New Lawe,
Of which Crist Lord is and felawe.

LAY (4)

4.109-110 RR lay – Dido as speaker, in her letter she says she will kill herself with a
swan’s feather in her brain
As king Menander in a lay
The sothe hath founde, wher sche lay

5.1191-1192 RR lay – Genius on Greek Religion, on Minerva
And sche was nyh the grete lay [lake]
Of Triton founde, wher she lay [placed]
A child forcast [cast away]

8.1669-1670 RR lay - Apollonius
Sche goth hir doun, ther as he lay,
Wher that sche harpeth many a lay

8.2663-2664 RR lay – Amans on Youthe
So besy was upon his lay, [law]
That he non hiede where I lay

LETTE (1)

2.93-4 RR lette – Genius, just before first tale of Book 2
And if he may put eny lette, [obstacle]
He doth al that he mai to lette. [hinder]

LEVE (20)

1.1807-1808 RR leve – Tale of Florent
Sche put hire hand and be his leve
Besoghte him that he wolde leve

2.113-114 RR leve – Acis and Galatea
How that another hadde leve [permission]
To love there as he mote leve [might desire]

3.529-530 RR leve – Amans on wrath and cheste
he tells lady all his grief
I speke it forth and noght ne leve. [keeping back nothing]
And thogh it be beside hire leve. . . [without her permission]

3.1179-1180 RR leve – Amans wrestles with predicament
Reson seith that I scholde leve [cease]
To love, wher ther is no leve [permission]
To spede, and Will seith theragein
That such an herte is to vilein,
Which dar noght love. . .

3.1725-1726 RR leve – Genius' advice
Be suche ensamples, as thei stonde,
Mi sone, thou miht understonde. . .
To take where a man hath leve [permission]
Good is, and elles he mot leve [do without]

3.2205-2206 RR leve – Amans after tale of Orestes; wants to know:
What is done, and what to leve. [avoid]
And over this now be your leve. . .

3.2751-2752 RR leve – mixed speakers twice in this passage at end of Book 3
“Mi sone, er we departe atwinne,
I schal behinde nothing leve.”
“Mi goode fader, be your leve. . .
As ye that be my soul hele, [soul's health]
That ye fro me wol nothing hele [conceal]. . .
“Mi sone, art thou coupable of Slowthe

In eny point which to him longeth?”
“My fader, of tho pointz me longeth
To wite plainly what thei meene. . .

4.1159-1160 RR leve – Amans on Idleness and lady
he waits to see
What is to done and what to leve.
And so, whan time is, be hir leve,
What thing sche bit me don, I do,
And wher sche bidt me gon, I go,
And whanne hir list to clepe, I come.
Thus hath sche fulliche overcome
Min ydelnesse. . .

4.1381-1382 RR leve – Tale of Rosiphelee
lady replies to Rosiphelee’s question (and RR *hiere*):
“Forthi, ma dame, gif me leve,
I mai noght longe with you leve.” [remain]

5.3401-3402 RR leve – Jason and Medea
Echon of other tok his leve,
Whan thei no lengere myhten leve.

5.6479-6480 RR leve – Genius on pilfering and stealth
It were betre noght begonne
Than take a thing withoute leve,
Which thou most after nedes leve,
And yit have malgre’ forth withal. [spite]

5.6601-6602 RR leve – Amans responds to Genius’ speech on stelth and pilfering
(uses same RR)
Al is to hevye and to hot
To sette on hond withoute leve.
And thus I mot algate leve [must certainly renounce]
To stele that I mai noght take. . .

5.6943-6944 RR leve – Amans to Genius
Min holi fader, certes no.
Bot if I hadde riht good leve, [Unless; permission]
Such mecherie I thenke leve. [to avoid]

6.201-202 RR leve – Amans on Drunkenness of lovers
And so it were to me leverre
Than such a sihte for to leve,
If that sche wolde gif me leve

To have so mochel of mi wille.

6.1359-1360 RR leve – shared RR between Genius and Amans; on sorcery

Mi sone, if thou of such a lore

Hast ben er this, I red thee leve.” [also heavy anaphora in this passage]

“Min holi fader, be youre leve. . . I wot nocht o word what ye mene.

8.465-466 RR leve - Apollonius

To grieve his bodi wol nocht leve. [aggrieve; leave off]

Forthi withoute take leve [see note at back]

8.739-740 RR leve – Apollonius

And preith he scholde his thoghtes leve.

He seith, “My dame, be youre leve” . . .

8.2881-2882 RR leve – Amans to Venus after swoon (see laste a few later)

Forthi mi conseil is thou leve.

“Ma dame,” I seide, “be your leve”

8.3151-3152 RR leve – Gower’s prayer; end of poem, see *more* and *hele*; triplet

And can nought se the ryhte weie

How to governe his oghne estat,

Bot everydai stant in debat

Withinne himself, and can nought leve.

And thus forthy my final leve

I take now for evere more

Withoute makynge any more

Of love and of his dedly hele,

Which no phisicien can hele.

8.3087v-3088v RR leve – Gower; Farewell to Earthly Love; see *hele*, *wise*)

Whan game is beste, is best to leve:

And thus forthi my fynal leve

LICH (1)

8.1075-1076 RR lich – Tale of Apollonius

A sorwe unto his sorwe lich. [alike]

For evere among upon the lich [corpse]

LICH / HEVENELICH (1)

6.1529-30 qRR hevenelich / lich – Ulysses and Telegonus

Bot as of beauté hevenelich

It was most to an angel lich.

LONGETH (2)

3.2759-60 RR longeth – RR shared twice between Amans and Genius

“Mi sone, er we departe atwinne,
I schal behinde nothing leve.”

“Mi goode fader, be your leve. . .

As ye that be my soul hele, [soul’s health]
That ye fro me wol nothing hele [conceal]. . .

“Mi sone, art thou coupable of Slowthe
In eny point which to him longeth?”

“My fader, of tho pointz me longeth
To wite plainly what thei meene. . .

5.2525-2526 RR longeth – Genius on covetousness of lovers wed for money

And other thing which therto longeth.

For in non other wise hem longeth

To love, bot thei profit finde. . .

LOST (1)

5.1751-1752 RR lost – Genius on Religion, Christians

Which Adam whilom broghte ous inne,

Ther scholde alle men be lost;

Bot Crist restoreth thilke lost. . .

LOVE (4)

1.3421-3422 RR love – Genius, end of Book 1

Hire fader lif sche gat therfore,

And wan with al the kinges love.

Forthi, my sone, if thou wolt love,

It sit thee wel to leve Pride. . .

3.883-884 RR love – Amans on hate between him and lady

The word I hate and hire I love,

What so me schal betide of love.

5.1419-20 RR love – Genius on Greek Religion

Why Cupide is the god of love,

For he his moder dorste love.

7.5321-2 RR love – Tobias and Sara

Wherof the riche of the cité,

Of lusti folk that couden love,

Assoted were upon hire love. . .

LYHT (1)

6.1981-1982 RR lyht – Nectanabus; lady gets deceived with dragon dreams

Mette, as sche slepte thilke while,
Hou fro the hevene cam a lyht
Which al hir chambre made lyht.

MAI(I) / MAI (5)

1.99-100 RR may / Maii – Amans

To walke, as I yow telle may,
And that was in the monthe of Maii,
Whan every brid hath chose his make
And thenkth his merthes for to make

1.3253-3254 RR Maii / mai – Peronelle speaks in Tale of Three Questions

Als wel in wynter as in Maii
The mannes hond doth what he mai

5.5967-8 RR mai / Maii – Tereus, Procne, Philomela

So that a brid hire hyde mai,
Betwen Averil and March and Maii

5.6735-6 RR may / Maii – Leucothoe, on her beauty

Nature hath set al that sche may,
That lich unto the fresshe Maii

8.815-6 RR may – Tale of Apollonius (passage contains play on *enforme* / *forme* and *Tyr* / *atir*)

That he with al that evere he may
This yonge faire freissche may

MAKE (5)

1.101-2 RR make – Gower as lover

To walke, as I yow telle may,
And that was in the monthe of Maii,
Whan every brid hath chose his make
And thenkth his merthes for to make

5.2295-2296 RR make – Two Coffers

Anon he let tuo cofres make
Of o semblance and of o make. . .

5.4275-4276 RR make – Phrixus and Helle
Whan Yno was the kinges make,
Sche caste hou that sche mihte make
These children to here fader lothe. . .

8.27-28 RR make – Genius on the fall and creation
In Paradis, and to his make
Him liketh Eve also to make

8.3077v-3078v RR make – Gower
That I no moore of love maake.
But he which hath of love his make

MEETE (3) [includes METE]

2.457-8 RR mete – Amans speaking of lady
Whan I my diere ladi mete,
And thenke how that I am nocht mete [equal]

3.51-2 RR meete – Amans on lady; two verbs: dream and meet
That al wakende I dreme and meete
That I with hire alone meete

4.2901-2902 RR mete – Amans speaks on lady (anti-sloth speech; wakeful for lady;
follows part of three RR within 20 lines). verb/verb dream/meet; (see also along,
dore, laste)
And otherwhile I dreme and mete
That I alone with hire mete

MEETE / UNMEETE (1 selected qRR)

3.1099-1100 Genius tells Amans patience is most despised
Til Homicide with hem meete.
Fro Merci thei ben al unmeete [To Mercy unequal]

MESURE (4)

4.3305-6 RR mesure – Genius after Cephalus, before Argus and Mercury; on sleep
Whan it is take be mesure.
Bot he which can no slep mesure. . .

5.7637-8 RR mesure – Genius on sacrilege; second to last couple in section, before
Prodigality section
He kepth himself, he kepth his frendes,

So stant he sauf to bothe hise endes,
That he exceedeth no mesure,
So wel he can himself mesure.

7.2159-60 RR mesure – Genius on Flattery
What man wol nocht himself mesure,
Men sen fulofte that mesure
Him hath forsake

7.4235-6 RR mesure – Genius on Chastity
the Philosophre techeth / To Alisandre, and him betecheth
The lore hou that he schal mesure
His bodi, so that no mesure
Of fleishshly lust he scholde exceed

MORE (2)

8.3153-4 RR more – Gower's prayer; end of poem, see more and hele; TRIPLET
debat
Withinne himself, and can nought leve.
And thus forthy my final leve
I take now for evere more
Withoute makynge any more
Of love and of his dedly hele,
Which no phisicien can hele.

8.3090v-91v RR moore – Gower's Farewell to Earthly Love
Withoute makynge eny moore,
I take now for evere moore

MORE / NEVEREMORE (1 qRR)

6.693-4 qRR more / neveremore – Amans
As ye speke of, what scholde I more?
For thanne I wolde neveremore

MUE/REMUE (1)

3.1411-1412 Pyramus and Thisbe
And Tisbee dorste nocht remue, [flee]
Bot as a bridd which were in mue [bird; mew (cote)]
Withinne a buissh sche kepte hire clos
So stille that sche nocht aros [(dared) not move]

MYN (1)

5.85-86 RR myn / Myn – Amans in major RR speech; refutes his own avarice (topic of bk 5, uses same terms to describe lady)

And in this wise, taketh kepe, [take hede]
If I hire hadde, I wolde hire kepe; [If I possessed her]
And yit no Friday wolde I faste, [abstain (from her)]
Thogh I hire kepte and hielde faste. [i.e., every day wd be a feast day]
Fy on the bagges in the kiste! [(money) bags; chest]
I hadde ynogh, if I hire kiste. [kissed]
For certes, if sche were myn,
I hadde hir levere than a myn [wd rather have her]
Of gold. For al this worldes riche [earthly kingdom]
Ne mihte make me so riche
As sche, that is so inly good.
I sette noght of other good

NAME (1)

1.3393-3394 RR name – Tale of Three Questions

Alphonse was his propre name:
The knyht also, if I schal name,
Danz Petro hihte. . .

NEWE (1)

Prol. 91v-92v RR newe
And eek somdel after the newe,
I wol begynne for to newe.

NOTE (2)

4.2415-6 RR note – Genius on Discoverers and Inventors

The ferste was of which men note.
And of musique also the note
In mannes vois. . .thus fond Jubal. . .

5.6001-2 RR note – Tereus, Procne, and Philomela; birdsong as reminder of her story

Bothe of hir forme and of hir note,
Wherof men mai the storie note.

ON (1)

5.7783-7784 RR on – Genius on Prodigality

For love schal noghtr bere his pris
Be reson, whanne it passeth on.

So have I sen ful many on. . .

OULE/DEFOULE (1 qRR)

3.585-586 qRR oule / defoule – Amans on Cheste during his long speech
Bot oule on stock and stock on oule:
The more that a man defoule

PEINE (2)

4.413-4 RR peine – Pygmalion
And thus himself he gan tormente
With such desese of loves peine,
That no man mihte him more peine.

7.3165-6 RR peine – Codrus
Of Pité for to speke plein,
Which is with mercy wel besein,
Fuloft he wole himselve peine
To kepe another fro the peine. . .

PLEIGNE (2; may not be pure RR but included for sound play)

ProL. 183-184 pleigne / pleine – Gower
Amende that wherof men pleigne
With trewe hertes and with pleine

7.2343-4 qRR pleine / pleigne – Diogenes and Aristippus
Of that he hiereth wordes pleine;
For him thar noght be reson pleigne

PLEINE / COMPLEIGNE (1 qRR)

1.113-114 qRR pleine / compleigne – Amans
I fond a swote grene pleine,
And ther I gan my wo compleigne

-PLAUNTE (1 qRR)

2.2368-70 qRR supplaunte / plaunte – Genius on supplantation; also note *supplaunt / supplaunte*)
Bot thei that worchen be supplaunt,
Yit wolden thei a man supplaunte,
And take a part of thilke plaunte

POINT (2)

1.1303-1304 RR point - Amans
I breke, and is the ferste point
Wherof that I am out of point

8.2579-2580 RR point – Amans
. . . I sih Tisbee,
Which on the scharpe swerdes point
For love deide in sory point [at a sad moment]

PREIE (3)

5.3535-3536 RR preie – Jason and Medea
Than mot he to the goddes preie, [pray]
And go so forth and take his preie. [prey]

5.5633-5634 RR preie – Tereus, Procne, Philomela
Riht as a wolf which takth his preie.
And sche began to crie and preie

5.6997-6998 RR preie – Genius on Sacrilege
What man that lasseth the franchise [dimishes privaledge]
And takth of Holi Cherche his preie, [prey]
I not what bedes he schal preie. [prayers]

PRESSE (1)

8.2751-2 RR presse – Amans just encountering Cupid
On every side so gret presse, [crowd]
That every lif began to presse [began to feel the pressure]

QUYTE / AQUITE (1)

8.2033-2034 qRR quyte / aquite – Amans to Genius after Apollonius
Wherof, my fader, God you quyte.
Bot if this point miself aquite

RECORDEN (1)

4.2529-2530 RR recorden – Genius on Alchemists and Philosopher's Stones
(DOUBLE RR)
So as the bokes it recorden,
The kinde of hem I schal recorden.
These olde Philosophers wyse

Be weie of kinde in sondri wise

REDE (10)

Prol. 15-16 RR rede – Gower
To him that schal it aldai rede,
For thilke cause, if that ye rede

1.77-78 RR rede – Gower
Of that thei schall hierafter rede:
For in good feith this wolde I rede,
That every man ensample take
Of wisdom which him is betake. . .

1.2271-2272 RR rede – Genius between Trump of Death and Narcissus
That thou this vice as I thee rede
Eschue schalt, a tale I rede. . .

2.3185-6 RR rede – Genius just before Constantine & Sylvester read / counsel;
moralizing on envy to Amans (twice used aweie RR)
So fain he wolde another ese.
Wherof, mi sone, for thin ese
Now herkne a tale which I rede,
And understond it wele, I rede.

3.817-818 RR rede – Genius introduces tale of Jupiter and Laar
Mi goode sone, as I thee rede.
For in another place I rede. . .

4.73-74 RR rede – Genius introduces Dido story
To wisse thee, my sone, and rede,
Among the tales whiche I rede. . .

5.7603-4 RR rede – Genius, on sacrilege
Forthi, mi sone, I wolde rede,
Be this ensample as thou myht rede

7.1329-1330 RR rede – Genius; Fifteen Stars; the third star
Is hote Algol the clere rede,
Which of Satorne, as I may rede. . .

7.2781-2 RR rede – Genius; Emperor Maximin
As be ensample thou myht rede;
And hold it in thi mynde, I rede.

8.2019-20 RR rede – Genius; TRIPLE RR; on lust, following Apollonius
To se love agein kinde falle,
For that makth sore a man to falle,
As thou myht of tofore rede.
Forthi, my sone, I wolde rede
To lete al other love aweie,
Bot if it be thurgh such a weie
As love and resoun wolde acorde.
For elles, if that thou descorde. . .

REGNE (7)

Prol. 31v-32v – Gower
Prayend unto the hihe regne
Which causeth every king to regne
(followed by stonde/understonde; tyde/bityde)

1.2909-2910 RR regne – Nebuchadnezzar’s Vainglorious Punishment
Thi regne schal ben overthrowe,
And thou despuiled for a throwe,
Bot that the rote scholde stonde.
Be that thou schalt wel understonde,
Ther schal abyden of thi regne
A time agein whan thou schalt regne. . .
So that he lich an oxe schal
Pasture, and that he be bereined [Feed; rained upon]
The weder schal upon thee reine.

1.3035-3036 RR regne – Nebuchadnezzar’s Vainglorious Punishment
. . .2987 The stormes and the reines falle
And was reformed to the regne
In which that he was wont to regne

3.2125-2126 RR regne – Telaphus and Teucer
On the way to Troy, Achilles and Telaphus make war on Teucer to seize lands:
to sese
His lond, as thei that wolden regne
And Theucer pute out of his regne

3.2647-2648 RR regne – see fell RR 3.2655; Telaphus and Teucer
His lond, as thei that wolden regne
And Theucer pute out of his regne

5.4881-4882 RR regne – Genius, second to last couplet before end of speech and
section of text

Thou shalt have wonder hou it is,
Among the folk in eny regne
That such a vice myhte regne

7.3901-3902 RR regne – Solomon’s Wisdom; Solomon prays with *rime riche*; see *believe* and *good*

Solomon’s prayer as a new king
“O King, be whom that I schal regne,
Gif me wisdom, that I may regne,
Forth with Thi poeple which I have,
To Thin honour mai kepe and save.”

RESTE (3)

5.419-420 RR reste – Genius moralizes on Tantalus
[the man who is consumed by Avarice has no sleep at night:]
He get himself bot litel reste.
For hou so that the body reste,
The herte upon the gold travaileth. . .

7.2935-6 Tale of Lycurgus
. . . wherof upon debat
Ther stod nothing, so that in reste [uncertainty (instability)]
Mihte every man his herte reste.

7.3465-6 Spertachus and Thameris; multiple qRR; 2RR in tale
For it belongeth to a knyht
Al gladly for to fihte as reste,
To sette his liege people in reste.

REULE (13)

1.17-18 RR reule
In which ther can no man him reule,
For loves lawe is out of reule

1.543-544 RR reule, also 1.531-2 RR hierie; 535-6 kepe – Genius after Siren story
Thou myht ensample taken hierie,
As I have told, and what thou hierie
Bel wel war. . .
For if thou woldest take kepe
And wisly cowthest warde and kepe. . .
But if thou cowthest sette in reule
Tho tuo, the thre were eth to reule

1.1341-1342 RR reule –Amans
So that I may myn herte reule
In loves cause after the reule.

4.1263-1264 RR reule – Tale of Rosiphelee
. . . Venus the goddesse,
Which loves court hath for to reule,
Hath broght hire into betre reule [(Will) have broght her up (i.e., educated her)]
Forth, with Cupide. . . [by means of Cupid]

4.2303-2304 RR reule – Genius to Amans; six RR couplets in this speech
. . .prouesse
Is caused upon loves reule
To him that can manhode reule;
And ek toward the wommanhiede,
Who that therof wol taken hiede. . .

5.7127v-7128v RR reule – Genius on Sacrilege of lovers; see *laste*
Outake that him lacketh reule
His oghne estat to guide and reule

6.1283-1284 RR reule – Genius, Sorcery and Withcraft
He stant so ferforth out of reule,
Ther is no wit that mai him reule

7.47-48 RR reule – Genius' opening to Book 7
Practique enformeth ek the reule,
Hou that a worthi king schal reule

7.1653-1654 RR reule – Genius, Practice
To techen of vertu thilke reule,
Hou that a king himself schal reule
Of his moral condicion. . .

7.2335-2336 RR reule – Diogenes and Aristippus
Bot if a prince wolde him reule [himself]
Of the Romeins after the reule. . .this vice (flattery) shd be refused

7.2921-2922 RR reule – Tale of Lycurgus
[Lycurgus uses the law wisely]
Wherof he scholde his poeple reule,
Hath set upon so good a reule

7.4145-4146 RR reule – Genius, Education of the King
Be so the king hem bothe reule,

For elles al goth out of reule.

7.4263-4264 RR reule - Chastity
His bodi so to guide and reule,
That he ne passe noght the reule,
Wherof that he himself beguile.
For in the womman is no guile. . .

RICHE (2)

5.87-88 RR riche – Amans in major RR speech; refutes his own avarice (topic of bk 5, uses same terms to describe lady)

And in this wise, taketh kepe, [take hede]
If I hire hadde, I wolde hire kepe; [If I possessed her]
And yit no Friday wolde I faste, [abstain (from her)]
Thogh I hire kepte and hielde faste. [i.e., every day wd be a feast day]
Fy on the bagges in the kiste! [(money) bags; chest]
I hadde ynogh, if I hire kiste. [kissed]
For certes, if sche were myn,
I hadde hir levere than a myn [wd rather have her]
Of gold. For al this worldes riche [earthly kingdom]
Ne mihte make me so riche
As sche, that is so inly good.
I sette noght of other good

5.2397-2398 RR riche – Tale of the Beggars and the Two Pastries; peasant speaker uses RR to grab king's attention

“Ha, lord, wel mai the man be riche
Whom that a king list for to riche.”

RODES (1)

4.1629-1630 RR Rodes/rodes - Genius to Amans on diligence in love
So that be londe and ek be schipe
He mot travaille for worschipe
And make manye hastyf rodes,
Sometime in Prus, sometime in Rodes. . .

-SCHIPE (42 qRR total)

Prol. 1015-1016 qRR felaschipe / schipe – Gower
Bot Noe with his felaschipe
Which only weren saulf be schipe

1.1163-4 qRR felaschipe / schipe – Trojan Horse

With al the hole felaschipe,
And forth thei wenten into schipe

2.325-326 qRR felaschipe / kindeschipe – Travelers and the Angel
And seide hem, for the kindeschipe
That thei have done him felaschipe. . .

2.741-742 qRR worschipe / felaschipe – Tale of Constance
she is sent off in “A nakid schip withoute stiere” (709) then rescued:
Out of the schip with gret worschipe
Thei toke hire into felaschipe

2.1107-1108 qRR felaschipe / schipe – Constance and the would-be rapist
Unknowe what hire schal betide;
And fell so that be nyhtes tide
This knyht withoute felaschipe
Hath take a bot and cam to schipe

2.3103-3104 qRR unkindeschipe / felaschipe – Genius moralizing on Pope Boniface
Be every weie to compasse
How that he migte alle othre passe,
As he which thurgh unkindeschipe
Envieth every felaschipe.

3.1021-1022 qRR felaschipe / schipe – Namplus and the Greeks
Gregois were
Homward with al the felaschipe
Fro Troie upon the see be schipe

4.731-2 qRR schipe / felaschipe – Demophon and Phyllis, opening couplet
King Demophon, whan he be schipe
To Troieward with felaschipe
Sailende goth. . .

4.1119-1120 qRR besischipe / ladischipe – Confessor on Idleness; to Amans
What hast thou don of besischipe
To love and to the ladischipe
Of hire which thi ladi is?

4.1627-8 qRR schipe / worschipe – Genius to Amans on diligence in love
So that be londe and ek be schipe
He mot travaille for worschipe
And make manye hastyf rodes,
Sometime in Prus, sometime in Rodes. . .

4.1729-1730 qRR ydelschipe / ladischipe – Amans on love and crusading
Ther scholde me non ydelschipe
Departen fro hir ladischipe.

4.1957-8 qRR worschipe / felaschipe – Nauplus and Ulysses; in her letter, Laodomia
begs Proteselaus to stay (though there is no direct discourse, the passage suggests that
the RR is her rhetorical strategy, which the king resists)

Hou sche hath axed of the wyse,
Touchende of him in such a wise,
That thei have don hire understonde,
Towardes othre hou so it stonde . . .
Be olde daies thanne hielden,
That thei non other thing behielden. [would consider]
And thus the fader for worschipe
Forth with his sone of felaschipe
Thurgh lust of armes weren dede. . .[love; slain]

4.2329-2330 qRR ydelschipe / felaschipe – Confessor on idleness to Amans (six RR in
speech; another six qRR)
all man's deeds belong to love
Belongeth: for of ydelschipe
He hateth all the felaschipe.

4.2949-50 qRR schipe / felaschipe – Ceix and Alceone
So that he mihte be reformed
Of that he hadde be transformed. . .
As he which wolde go be schipe;
And for to don him felaschipe
His wif. . .

5.149-50 qRR felaschipe / drunkschipe – Midas
. . .a cherl him hente
With strengthe of other felaschipe,
So that upon his drunkschipe
Thei bounden him with chenes faste,
And forth thei ladde him als so faste
Unto the king, which hihte Myde. . . .

5.195-6 qRR worschipe / lordschipe – Midas
. . .And if worschipe
I axe and of the world lordschipe. . .

5.985-986 qRR chipe / lordschipe – Genius on Greek Religion, Neptune given part of
Jupiter's goods
. . .so that be schipe

He mad him strong of the lordschipe. . .[so that]
. . .every man hath doute
Upon his marche for to saile; [territory]
For he anon hem wolde assaile

5.3113-4 qRR schipe / felaschipe – Achilles and Deidamia
He tok also with him be schipe,
And thus togedre in felaschipe. . .

5.3325-6 qRR schipe / worschipe – Jason and Medea, plus gate one Genius down
He thoghte don hem gret worschipe,
For thei anon come out of schipe. . .

5.3901-2 qRR schipe / felaschipe – Jason and Medea, double qRR w seil
And straght sche goth hire unto schipe
Of Grece with that felaschipe,
And thei anon drowe up the seil.
And al that nyht this was consel [secret]

5.4699-4700 qRR unkindeschipe / felaschipe – Genius on Avarice
Him thenkth on his unkindeschipe
That him nedeth no felaschipe.
Be so the bagge and he acorden,
Him reccheth noght what men recorden
Of him, or it be evel or good.
For al his trust is on his good,
So that alone he falleth ofte,
Whan he best weneth stonde alofte,
Als wel in love as other wise;
For love is evere of som reprise
To him that wole his love holde.
Forthi, mi sone, as thou art holde,
Thouchende of this tell me thi schrift. . .

5.4887-8 qRR unkindeschipe / felaschipe – second couplet in Confessor's new speech,
section on Ingratitude, a vice
And cleped is Unkindeschipe,
Of covine and of felaschipe
With Avarice he is withholde.
Him thenkth he scholde noght ben holde

5.4909-10 qRR kindeschipe / frendschipe – Genius in same speech on Ingratitude
That makth a kinde herte dull,
To sette his trust in such frendschipe,
Ther as he fint no kindeschipe. . .

It is al on to seie unkinde
As thing which don is agein kinde

5.5207-8 qRR unkindeschipe / ladischipe – first couplet in Genius' reply to Amans
Mi sone, of that unkindeschipe,
The which toward thi ladischipe
Thou pleignest. . .

5.5225-6 qRR unkindeschipe / worschipe – Genius, third to last couplet of the same
speech

For ther mai be no grevance
To love, as in unkindeschipe.
Wherof to kepe thi worschipe,
So as these olde bokes tale,
I schal thee telle a redi tale

5.5319-20 qRR felaschipe / schipe – Theseus and Ariadne
With him and with his felaschipe
Forth into Crete he goth be schipe

5.5427-8 qRR unkindeschipe / goodschipe – Theseus and Ariadne
. . .fer from alle loves kinde.

For more than the beste unkinde
Theseus, which no trouthe kepte,
Whil that this yonge ladi slepte,
Fulild of his unkindeschipe
Hath al forgete the goodschipe. . .
[he takes to schipe and leaves her stranded]

5.5597-8 qRR felaschipe / schipe – Tereus, Procne, Philomela
This Tereus goth forth to schipe
With him and with his felaschipe

5.7493-4 qRR felaschipe / schipe – Paris and Helen
And thus he goth forth out of schipe
And takth with him his felaschipe.

5.7553-4 qRR felaschipe / schipe – Paris and Helen
With him and with his felaschipe
And forth thei bere hire unto schipe

5.7563-4 qRR felaschipe / worschipe – Paris and Helen
To Paris and his felaschipe
Al that thei couthen of worschipe

5.7619-20 qRR unkindeschipe / felaschipe – Gower after Paris and Helen
Of Skarnesse and Unkindeschipe,
Which nevere drouh to felaschipe

6.15-6 Gower's opening to Book 6
Wherof the ferste is Dronkeschipe,
Which berth the cuppe felaschipe.

6.271-2 – Amans on Drunkenness of lovers
That in default of ladischipe
Per chance in such a drunkeschipe
I mai be ded er I be war.

6.503-4 qRR drunkeschipe / felaschipe – Marriage of Pirithous
Wherof be weie of drunkeschipe
The greteste of the felaschipe
Were oute of reson overtake;
And Venus, which hath also take. . .

6.543-4 qRR felaschipe / drunkeschipe – Galba and Vitellius
Galba and Vit. were the greatest in their drunkeschipe.
That was a sort of felaschipe,
For this thou miht wel understonde,
That man mai wel noght longe stonde. . .

6.1235-6 qRR felaschipe / drunkeschipe – Genius, first couplet after Nero story
Lo, thus togedre of felaschipe
Delicacie and drunkeschipe. . .

6.1945-6 Nectanabus; lady responds to Nectanabus and his qRR hote
“To take of him [Amos] so gret worschipe,
I wol do thee such ladischipe. . .”

7.3601-2 qRR worschipe / lordschipe – A Time for War
Bot it behoveth noght to seke [war].
Only the werre for worschipe,
Bot to the riht of his lordschipe

7.4389-90 qRR worschipe / idelschipe – Cyrus and the Lydians
Was non which wolde the worschipe
Of armes, bot in idelschipe. . .token hem to daunce and pleie.

SE (1)

6.1037-8 RR se – Dives and Lazarus

Hou Lazar set was in his se [heavenly seat]
Als ferr as evere he mihte se
With Habraham. . .

SEIE (1)

6.899-900 RR seie – Amans on Delicacy (see RR faste, here, hote, etc)
Lo thus, mi fader, as I seie,
Of lust the which myn yhe hath seie

SECHE / BESECHE (1 selected qRR)

4.2203-4 SECHE / BESECHE qRR and Amans/Genius – moral, pay attention to root
word; Genius' reply contains heavy number of RR
Amans: Wherof to telle you I beseche.”
C: “The ground, mi sone, for to seche. . .”

SEIN / BESEIN (1 selected qRR)

5.1511-1512 Genius on Idol Worship
[Idol is] “wel besein”
How myhte a mannes resoun sein?

-SEIL (5 selected qRR)

2.2151-2 qRR seil / conseil – Deianira, Hercules, and Nessus
And many a fraude of fals conseil
Ther ben hangende upon his seil.

3.1555-6 qRR seil / conseil – Amans on Danger as lady's companion
For evere he hangeth on hire seil, [Because; sail (i.e., keeps company w her)]
And is so prive' of conseil

4.1741-1742 qRR seile / conseile – Amans on love and crusading
A. knows not
On whether bord that I schal seile.
Thus can I noght miself conseile,
Bot al I sette on aventure,
And am. . .out of cure

5.991-992 qRR saile / assaile – Genius on Greek Religion, Neptune given part of
Jupiter's goods
. . .so that be schipe
He mad him strong of the lordschipe. . .[so that]
. . .every man hath doute

Upon his marche for to saile; [territory]
For he anon hem wolde assaile

5.3903-4 qRR seil / consel – Jason and Medea, double qRR w schipe
And straght sche goth hire unto schipe
Of Grece with that felaschipe,
And thei anon drowe up the seil.
And al that nyht this was consel [secret]

SIDE / ASIDE (2 qRR)

5.13-14 Genius, early in Book 5; he uses NO RR but this one qRR in his speech, and
then Amans responds with his famous 6RR speech
Though peace is gone
And werre cam on every side
Which alle love leide aside [put aside all love]
Conf. is setting up a moral on avarice

5.551-2 Genius; jelous man
. . . lith upon his other side,
And sche with that drawth hire aside

SIEKE (1)

8.2367-2368 RR sieke – Venus's reply to Amans's prayer
Mi medicine is nocht to sieke
For thee for for suche olde sieke

SOBRE / ASSOBRE (1 qRR)

6.459-60 sobre / assobre – Genius
And waxe of lovedrunke sobre.
And thus I rede thou assobre

SOGHTE / BESOGHTE (1 sample qRR)

3.1689-1690 qRR soghte / besoghte – Phebus and Daphne
And therupon to hire he soghte
In his folhaste, and so besoghte

STIERE (1)

1.2943-2944 RR stiere – Nebuchadnezzar's Vainglorious Punishment
And whan a schip hath lost his stiere, [rudder]
Is non so wys that mai him stiere [guide]

STOD / UNDERSTOD (1 sample qRR)

2.1383-1384 – Constance (Allee physically standing vs. mental)

Bot wel he sih and understod
That he toward Arcenne stod

STONDE / UNDERSTONDE (7 qRR)

3.1721-2 qRR stonde / understonde – Genius; after Phebus and Daphne (plus leve RR)

Be suche ensamples, as thei stonde,
Mi sone, thou miht understonde. . .
To take where a man hath leve [permission]
Good is, and elles he mot leve [do without]

4.3693-4 qRR stonde / understonde – Amans' last speech in Book 4

Mi fader, hou so that it stonde,
Now have I plainly understonde
Of Slouthes court the propreté

5.367-8 qRR stonde / understonde – Tantalus

. . . I schal thee redely
Devise hou men therinne stonde.
In helle, thou schalt understonde

5.1969-1970 qRR stonde / understonde – Genius; rhyme that ends a speech and section of the text

“Mi sone, and I thee schal devise
In such a manere as thei stonde,
So that thou schalt hem understonde.”

5.2639-40 qRR understonde / stonde – Genius; second to last couplet before he ends speech and begins tale (last one is here/matiere)

And who that wolde ensamples telle,
Be olde daies as thei felle,
Than mihte a man wel understonde
Such love mai nocht longe stonde.

5.6355-6 qRR understonde / stonde – Genius; second to last couplet in speech and end of section

And so it was, and so it is,
And so it schal forevere stonde.
And for thou schalt it understonde,
Nou herkne a tale next suiende . . .

7.3025-6 qRR stonde / understonde – Tale of Lycurgus; Lycurgus as speaker to his parliament; this tale has five RR couplets in 100 lines
And if it like thee to knowe
Some of here names hou thei stonde,
Nou herkne and thou schalt understonde.

STRANGE (1)

7.3465-6 RR strange – Spertachus and Thameris; multiple qRR; 2RR in tale
And thus onliche of Goddes wille,
He which that wolde himselve strange
To Pité, fond mercy so strange,
That he withoute grace is lore.

SUITE (1)

5.4385-6 RR suite – Genius describes personified usury
Full clothed of his oghne suite,
Which after gold makth chace and suite

TAKE / UNDERTAKE (1 sample qRR)

3.1743-4 qRR take / undertake – Genius
And that a man good consail take,
Er he his pourpos undertake.

TALE (1)

5.5227-8 RR tale – Genius, second to last couplet of speech before telling a tale
For ther mai be no grevance
To love, as in unkindeschipe.
Wherof to kepe thi worschipe,
So as these olde bokes tale,
I schal thee telle a redi tale

TAUHTE / BE TAUHTE or TAWHT / BETAWHT (2 qRR)

7.717-720 qRR tauhte / betauhte – Astronomy; DOUBLE qRR
Tak hiede, for I wol beginne,
So as the Philosophre tauhte [taught]
To Alisandre and it betauhte. [commended]
Wherof that he was fulli tawht [instructed]
Of wisdom, which was him betawht. [entrusted]

TELLE (1)

5.445-6 RR telle – Amans in response to Genius’ Tale of Tantalus
“Mi fader, for that ye nou telle,
I have herd ofte time telle
Of Jelousie. . .”

THO (5)

Prol. 195-196 RR tho – Gower; plus soughten/ besoughten
Men sein how that thei weren tho
Ensample and ruele of alle tho

2.1477-8 RR tho – Constance
And as fortune wolde tho,
He was duellende as one of tho

4.1365-6 RR tho – Rosiphelee
That this, which com ridende tho,
Tidinges couthe telle of tho

7.1481-2 RR tho – Authors of Astronomy
I mai nocht knowen alle tho
That writen in the time tho
Of this science

8.2657-8 RR tho – Amans at end
Lo, these foure were tho
Whiche I sih, as me thoghte tho

THROWE (2)

2.2157-2158 RR throwe – Hercules and Deianire
Whan Hercules withinne a throwe
Al only hath his herte throwe
Upon this faire Deianire

4.97-98 RR throwe – Dido
Dido cannot endure
The hote peine of loves throwe,
Anon withinne a litel throwe
A lettre unto hir kniht hath write. . .

THROWE / OVERTHROWE (18)

1.3065-3066 qRR throwe / overthrowe – Genius after Nebuchadnezzar's Vainglorious Punishment

That thogh it mounte for a throwe,
It schal doun falle and overthrowe.

3.1079-1080 qRR throwe / overthrowe – Genius after Namplus's Tale

And so farth Hate for a throwe:
Til he a man hath overthrowe

3.1637-8 qRR throwe / overthrowe – Genius.

Forthi betre is to soffre a throwe
Than be to wilde and overthrowe.

4.1005-6 qRR throwe / overthrowe – Phaeton

His carte dryve at eny throwe,
Wherof that he mihte overthrowe

7.2395-6 qRR throwe / overthrowe – Triumph, Humility, and the Roman Emperor;
ribald commoner is the speaker addressing emperor

Bot know thiself, what so befalle.
For men sen ofte time falle
Thing which men wende siker stonde. . .
The whiel per chance another day
Mai torne, and thou myht overthrowe;
Ther lasteth nothing but a throwe." [moment]

7.3263-4 qRR throwe / overthrowe – Pompeius and the King of Armenia; 2RR and 3qRR in passage

God is himself the champion,
Whos strengthe mai no man withstonde.
Forevere yit it hath so stonde,
That God a tirant overladde.
Bot wher Pite' the regne ladde,
Ther mihte no fortune laste
Which was grevous, bot ate laste
The God himself it hath redresced.
Pite' is thilke vertu blessed
Which nevere let his maister falle;
Bot crualte', thogh it so falle
That it mai regne for a throwe,
God wole it schal ben overthrowe.

8.211-212 qRR throwe / overthrowe – Genius on incest; Caligula

And thus for likinge of a throwe
Forevere his lust was overthrowe

TIDE / BETIDE (4 qRR) [see TYDE below]

1.149-150 qRR betide / tide – Gower / Amans
Of wel or we, that schal betide
To hem that loven, at that tide

2.1105-1106 qRR betide / tide – Constance and the would-be rapist (also see -schipe)
Unknowe what hire schal betide;
And fell so that be nyhtes tide
This knyht withoute felaschipe
Hath take a bot and cam to schipe

2.2859-60 qRR betide / tide – Pope Boniface
Toward the pope on nyghtes tide,
Mai no man flee that schal betide.
[no ocean tide]

3.95-96 qRR betide / tide – Amans
Bot, fader, if it so betide,
That I aproche at eny tide [time]

TOUCHE (1)

5.6277-6278 RR touche – Calistona; Diana speaks in RR to chastise Calistona, who runs away in shame after these words
“Awey, thou foule beste. . .
This chaste water for to touche;
For thou hast take such a touche,
Which nevere mai ben hol agein.”

TROUBLE (1)

6.361-2 RR trouble – Jupiter and the Two Cases
. . .the blind boteler / Gifth of the trouble in stede of cler /
And ek the cler in stede of trouble: [turbid]
Lo, hou he can the hertes trouble, [murky]

TWO / ATWO (1 qRR)

4.431-432 qRR two / atwo – Pygmalion
For er thei wente thanne atwo,
A knave child between hem two
Thei gete. . .[Paphos]

TYDE (1)

5.3755-3756 RR tyde – Jason and Medea
Thei wisten nocht what scholde tyde, [knew not; happen]
Bot waiten evere upon the tyde,

TYDE / BETYDE (8)

Prol.35v-36v qRR betyde / tyde – Gower, first-recension
As it bifel upon a tyde,
As thing which scholde tho bityde

4.1779-1780 qRR tyde / betyde – Genius following A's love and crusading speech
Thou nost what chance schal betyde.
Betre is to wayte upon the tyde
Than rowe agein the stremes stronge.

5.4847-4848 qRR betyde / tyde – Tale of Babio and Croceus
It was wel seene at thilke tyde;
For as it scholde of ryht betyde,

5.6939-6940 qRR betyde / tyde – Genius wraps up Tale of Hercules and Faunus
In aunter if thee so betyde
As Faunus dede thilke tyde

6.995-996 qRR betyde / tyde – Tale of Dives and Lazarus
And as it scholde so betyde,
A povere lazre upon a tyde
Cam to the gate

8.39-40 qRR betyde / tyde – Genius tells history of marriage and incest
So as it scholde of hem [Adam and Eve] betyde,
In Paradis at thilke tyde
Ne duelten

8.1787-8 qRR tyde / betide – Apollonius
Towardes Tharse upon the tyde.
Bot he that wot what schal betide

8.2757-2758 qRR betyde / tyde – Amans and Cupid's cure
Thei stoden there at thilke tyde,
To se what ende schal betyde
Upon the cure of my sotie.

WARDE (6)

1.331-332 RR warde - Genius
Thin yhe for to kepe and warde,
So that it passe nocht his warde.

3.1953-1954 RR warde – Orestes
And tok this child into his warde, [keeping (protection)]
And seide he wolde him kepe and warde [guard]

5.2963-2964 RR warde – Achilles and Deidamia
Achilles, whom to kepe and warde,
Whil he was yong, as into warde

5.5297-5298 RR warde – Theseus and Ariadne; the Minotaur
That what man that withinne wente,
Ther was so many a sondri wente, [diverse turn]
[That he cannot get out / wanders about]
And in this hous to loke and warde
Was Minotaurus put in warde,
That what lif that therinne cam,
Or man or beste, he overcam

5.6717-6718 RR warde – Leucothoe, near opening, on Venus
As sche which the tresor to warde [guard]
Of love hath withinne hir warde [see note]

6.1601-1602 RR warde – Ulysses and Telegonus
To kepen him withinne warde, [guarded condition]
He sette his bodi for to warde [protect]

WEDDE (2)

1.1587-1588 RR wedde – Tale of Florent
“Have hier myn hond, I schal thee wedde.”
And thus his trowthe he leith to wedde.

2.2661-2 RR wedde – False Bachelor
He seith, the kinges dowhtere wedde,
For so the ring was leid to wedde. . .

WEENE (1)

4.2595-6 RR weene – Genius on Three Philosopher’s Stones
Than for to worchen upon weene [expectation]
In thing which stant nocht as thei weene.

WEIE (1)

8.1451-1452 RR weie – Thaise is speaker in Tale of Apollonius

It mai noght falle be this weie;

Bot soffre me to go mi weie

WEIE / AWEIE (43 qRR) [Note that some of these couplets, such as “aweie” and “righte aweie” or “alle aweie” and “aweie” sound alike, but I keep them separate from the “aweie” broken RR in the section below]

ProL. 131-132 qRR weie / aweie – Gower

And lawe hath take hire double face,

So that justice out of the weie

With ryhtwisnesse is gon aweie.

ProL. 419-420 qRR weie / aweie – Gower

For if the wolf com in the weie,

Her gostly staf is thanne aweie

1.89-92 qRR weie / aweie – Gower as a lover

Of thilke unsely jolif wo,

Whos reule stant out of the weie,

Nou glad and nou gladnesse aweie,

And yet it may noght be withstonde

For oght that men may understonde.

1.1051-1052 qRR weie / aweie – Tale of Mundus and Paulina

For love put reson aweie

And can noght se the rihte weie.

2.2471-2472 qRR weie/aweie – Geta and Amphitriton (one over from wyle/whyle)

That whil he was out of the weie,

Amphitriton hire love a weie / Hath take. . .wyle/whyle

3.1867-8 qRR aweie / weie – Genius

Whan Wit and Reson ben aweie,

And that Folhaste is in the weie

Wherof hath falle gret vengeance.

3.2073-4 qRR weie / aweie – Orestes, murders mother by ripping breast from bone

Hire pappes bothe and caste aweie

Amiddes in the carte weie

[see also the anaphora in Orestes’s speech and the sake/forsake qRR]

4.257-8 qRR a weie / weie – Genius after Penelope and Grossteste; on Sloth
For that here oyle was aweie
To lihte here lampes in his weie

4.1027-8 qRR weie / aweie – Phaeton
Pheton agein his defence
His charr hath drive out of the weie,
Ordeigneth that he fell aweie

4.2097-8 qRR weie / aweie – Hercules and Achelons
Ther was no ston, ther was no rote,
Which mihte letten hem the weie,
But al was voide and take aweie.

4.2297-8 qRR a weie / weie – Genius on idleness
That love honeste in sondri weie
Profiteth, for it doth aweie
The vice

4.3530-40 qRR weie/aweie – Iphis and Araxarathen
Unto his sped he fond no weie,
So that he caste his hope aweie

5.315-6 qRR weie/aweie – Midas
And whan he sih his touche aweie,
He goth him hom the rihte weie. . .

5.835-836 qRR a weie / weie – Genius; the first couplet introducing the Greek Religion; also note the preceding couplet that concludes on The Egyptians (Religion Speech):

Fro resoun stant in misbelieve
For lacke of lore, as I believe.
Among the Greks, out of the weie, [confused]
As thei that reson putte aweie. . .
[it is meschief to make a false god chief, 5.863-4)

5.1157-1158 qRR a weie / weie – Genius, on the Greek Religion, on Saturn
A vois unto Saturne tolde
Hou that his oghne sone him scholde
Out of his regne putte aweie;
And he because of thilke weie. . .
. . .began to hate. . .

5.1711-12 qRR a weie / weie – Genius on Religion: Jews; the Fall of Lucifer and Adam, at peak of nobility

Agein the God brak his defence
And fell out of his place aweie:
And riht be such a maner weie
The Jwes in here beste plit. . .

5.2163-4 qRR weie/aweie – Virgil’s Mirror
Hath undertake in alle weie.
This lord, which hadde his wit aweie
And was with Covoitise blent. . .

5.5067-8 qRR weie/aweie – Adrian and Bardus
Out of hir mouth tofore his weie
Sche let down falle, and wente aweie

5.5477-8 qRR weie/aweie – Theseus and Ariadne; [law of love by Theseus]
Forfeted hath in alle weie
That Adriagne he putte aweie

5.6341-2 qRR a weie / weie – Genius, after Calistona story, on rape
To robbe the virginité
Of a yong innocent aweie.
And overthis be other weie

5.6449-50 qRR weie/aweie – Agammemnon and Criseide
Agamemnon was thanne in weie
To Troieward, and tok aweie / This maiden. . .

5.6503-4 qRR a weie / weie – Genius, on Stealth and Pilfering
And what thing he fint in his weie,
Whan that he seth the men aweie,
He stelth it. . .

5.6651-2 qRR weie / aweie – Amans responds to Genius’ sermon (uses same qRR)
Be Stelthe or be som other weie,
That nou fro me stant fer aweie

5.7691-2 qRR a weie / weie – Genius, on Prodigality; on Largesce, which
Halt evere forth the middel weie.
Bot who that torne wole aweie. . .

6.147-8 qRR weie / aweie – Amans on Drunkenness of Lovers
If that sche be noght in the weie.
For thanne is al mi merthe aweie

6.555-6 qRR weie/aweie – Galba and Vitellius

For wher that wyn doth wit aweie,
Wisdom fath lost the rihte weie

6.603-4 qRR weie / aweie – Amans responds on Galba story
Bot wel I wot that in no wise
The drunkschipe of love aweie
I mai remue be no weie

6.909-910 qRR weie / aweie – Amans on Delicacy
myn heringe is aweie.
Thanne is he redy in the weie. . .

6.1141-2 qRR a weie / weie – Genius, on Delicacy following Dives and Lazarus
He ett, and drinketh the beste drinke;
Bot hou that evere he ete or drinke,
Delicacie he put aweie,
As he which goth the rihte weie. . .otherwise/wise

6.1807-8 qRR weie/aweie – Nectanabus
And he disguised fledde aweie
Be schipe, and hield the rihte weie

6.2151-2 qRR weie/aweie – Nectanabus; sette a seal on queen's womb
A seal, and goth him forth his weie.
With that the swevene wente aweie

7.1851-2 qRR a weie / weie – Genius: Esdras on King, Wine, Women, and Truth
And that he scheweth be this weie.
The wyn fulofte takth aweie
The reson fro the mannes herte

7.1903-4 qRR a weie / weie – Genius, Esdras on King, Wine, Women, and Truth
This worldes joie were aweie:
Thurgh hem men finden out the weie
To kniethode. . .

7.2777-8 qRR weie / aweie – Emperor Maximin
Or elles putte him al aweie.
Thus hield the lawe his rihte weie. . .

8.645-650 qRR weie / aweie – Tale of Apollonius
Whanne him thoghte alle grace aweie;
Ther cam a fisshere in the weie,
And sih a man ther naked stonde,
And whan that he hath understonde

The cause, he hath of him gret routhe,
And onliche of his povere trouthe. . .

7.3675-6 qRR weie / aweie – Gideon; angel advises Gideon
whoever falls on his stomach to drink
“Forsak and put hem alle aweie.
For I am myhti alle weie. . .”

7.4015-6 qRR weie/aweie – Courtiers and the Fool
The vices thanne gon aweie.
And every vertu holt his weie

7.4409-4410 qRR weie/aweie – Counsel of Balaam
What that he [Amalech] myhte be no weie
Defende his lond and putte aweie. . .

8.2381-2 qRR weie/aweie – Amans on Venus
seven out of ten couplets have quasi-RR; reader notices a concatenated or interlocking
quality to the rhymes, only slightly out of joint or imperfect
Bot as hir lyketh for to weie;
The trewe man ful ofte aweie
Sche put. . .
I not what othre men wol sein,
Bot I algate am so besein,
And stonde as on amonges alle
Which am out of hir grace falle. . .wende/ende; holde/beholde; seche/beseche

8.2863-4 qRR aweie / weie – Amans recovering from love
And whan Resoun it herde sein
That loves rage was aweie,
He cam to me the rihte weie

2917-8 qRR aweie / weie – Venus addresses John Gower, aweie/weie plus
guide/misguide
Whan that the lustes ben aweie:
Forthi to thee nys bot o weie,
In which let reson be thi guide;
For he may sone himself misguide,
That seth nought the peril tofore.

8.3091-2 qRR weie / aweie – Gower discusses a bad king who
And wil nought go the rihte weie,
Though God his grace caste aweie
No wondir is, for ate laste
He schal wel wite it mai nought laste

3147-8 qRR weie / aweie – Amans, toward end of poem
Wher as the wisdom goth aweie
And can nought se the ryhte weie

A WEIE / AWEIE (9)

1.1109-1110 broken RR a weie/aweie (right after take / undertake) – Trojan Horse
And therupon thei founde a weie,
Wher strengthe myhte noght aweie,
That sleihte scholde helpe thane

2.3139-40 and 3153-3154 broken RR a weie / aweie – Genius on envy (ends on ese and rede)

Be weie of kinde upon a vice
Is tempted, and be such a weie
Envie hath kinde put aweie. . .
Forthi, my goode diere sone,
If thou wolt finde a siker weie
To love, put Envie aweie.

3.921-922 broken RR aweie / a weie – Amans on tension between him and lady
That thei ne scholden finde a weie
To that thei wolde, bot aweie

3.1529-1530 broken RR aweie / a weie – Amans, last couplet in his speech to Genius
So mot I nedes taken hede
And schape how that he were aweie,
If I therto mai finde a weie.

3.2337-2338 broken RR a weie / aweie – Genius on homicide
And alle Resoun put aweie,
He can wel finde such a weie
To werre. . .

4.2555-5 RR broken RR a weie / aweie – Genius on Three Philosopher's Stones
And pureth hem be such a weie,
That al the vice goth aweie

5.1389-1390 broken RR a weie / aweie – Genius on Greek Religion, on Venus
Which alle danger putte aweie
Of love, and fond to lust a weie. . .
[Neabole 1437-8] Sche was to every man felawe,
And hild the lust of thilke lawe,
Which Venus of hirsself began.

7.3465-6 broken RR a weie / aweie – Spertachus and Thameris; multiple qRR; 2RR in tale

caste/overcaste; was/pass; passe/compasse

Sche schop his pouer to compasse

With strengthe of men be such a weie

That he schal nocht eschape aweie.

8.2021-22 broken RR a weie / aweie – Genius to Amans on lust

To se love agein kinde falle,

For that makth sore a man to falle,

As thou myht of tofore rede.

Forthi, my sone, I wolde rede

To lete al other love aweie,

Bot if it be thurgh such a weie

As love and resoun wolde acorde.

For elles, if that thou descorde. . .

WEL (1)

7.1913-1914 RR wel – Genius, Esdras on King, Wine, Women, and Truth; second to last couplet

A womman is the mannes bote,

His lif, his deth, his wo, his wel;

And this thing mai be schewed wel . . .

WEL / WHEL and WEL / WHIEL (13) [not RR but included for sound play]

1.2489-2490 qRR wel / whel – Albinus and Rosemund; Venus' wheel of fortune

Thei love ech other wonder wel.

Bot sche which kepth the blinde whel

2.241-242 wel / whel – Amans tells Genius that he hears

How that thei clymbe upon the whel,

And whan thei wene al schal be wel,. . .[then they fall]

2.1225-1226 whel / wel – Constance

And every lif hire wel.

Now herke how thilke unstable whel

Which evere torneth went aboute.

2. 1821-1822 qRR wel / whiel – Demetrius and Perseus

storm presses

So harde, that he wende wel

To passe. Bot the blinde whiel. . .

2.2351-2352 Genius on supplantation

For his fortune is to deceive,
And for to change upon the whel
His wo with othre mennes wel.

2.2959-2960 qRR wel / whiel – Pope Boniface

Whan that he stod on hih the whiel,
He can noght soffre himself be wel.
pope's fall

3.1839-1840 qRR wel / whiel – Athemas and Demephon

It thoughte hem alle he seide wel.
And thus Fortune hire dedly whiel
Fro werre torneth into pes.

4.1195-6 Amans to C on idleness

Al for thei scholde speke wel.
Thus mow ye sen mi besi whiel. . .

5.3991-2 qRR wel / whel – Jason and Medea; M's chariot

And up sche styh, and faire and wel
Sche drof forth bothe car and whel

5.7445-6 qRR wel / whiel – Paris and Helen; Cassandra's speech

And seide, "Allas, what mai ous eile?
Fortune with hire blinde whiel
Ne wol noght lete ous stonde wel.
For this I dar wel undertake,
That if Paris his weie take,
As it is seid that he schal do,
We ben forevere thanne undo."

7.815-6 Genius on the Seven Planets

Of gold glistrende sopke and whiel
The sonne his carte hath faire and wiel
In which he sitt, and is coroned. . .Set in the front of his corone. . .[repetition of corone
in passage]

7.2171-2 qRR wel / whiel – Codrus

It sit to every man livende
To be pitous, bot non so wel
As to a king, which on the whiel
Fortune hath set aboven alle.

7.4467-8 qRR wel / whiel – Balaam
In age bot it stonde wel,
Mistorneth al the laste whiel

WENTE (7)

4.167-8 RR wente – Penelope as speaker/writer of *rime riche*; addresses Odysseus
Sithe ferst than ye fro home wente, [Since first; departed]
That welnyh every man his wente [way]
To there I am, whil ye ben oute. . .

5.2725-6 RR wente – King and his Steward's Wife
The steward tok the gold and wente,
Withinne his herte and many a wente [contrivance]

5.4941-2 RR wente – Adrian and Bardus; how Adrian
To wode in his huntynge wente,
It hapneth at a soudein wente [turn of events]

5.5293-4 RR wente – Theseus and Ariadne; the Minotaur
That what man that withinne wente,
Ther was so many a sondri wente, [diverse turn]
[That he can't get out/wanders about]
And in this hous to loke and warde
Was Minotaurus put in warde,
That what lif that therinne cam,
Or man or beste, he overcam

6.1029-30 RR wente – Dives and Lazarus; both happen to die; complete reversal of
fortune for Dives
This riche man in the same throwe
With soudein deth was overthrowe,
And forth withouten eny wente
Into the helle straght he wente.

6.2361-2 qRR wente / miswente – Nectanabus
N. his craft miswente,
So it misfell him er he wente.

7.2249-50 RR wente – Diogenes and Aristippus
Bot Arisippe his bok aside
Hath leid, and to the court he wente,
Wher many a wyle and many a wente [wile; devious path]
. . .he caste

8.1785-6 RR wente – Appolonius
ship ready
Withoute lette of eny wente [hindrance of any plan]
With seil updrawe forth thei wente
Towardes Tharse upon the tyde.
Bot he that wot what schal betide,
The hihe God. . .

WERRE (3)

ProL. 175-6 RR werre – Gower
It is to wondre of thilke werre,
In which non wot who hath the werre

3.1645-1646 Genius to Amans
Who mai to love make a werre, [war]
That he ne hath himself the werre? [(Such) that; worse]

7.4371-2 Cyrus and the Lydians
Bot yit for oght that he do mihte
As in bataille upon the werre,
He hadde of hem alwey the werre.

WISE (31) [see also WISE / OTHERWISE and WYSE below]

ProL. 83v-84v RR wise – Gower, first recension
And write in such a maner wise,
Which may be wisdom to the wise

1.265-6 RR wise - Genius
Of othre thinges that ben wise:
I am noght tawht in such a wise

1.2017-8 RR wise – Genius, end of Tale of Capaneus before Trump of Death
And feigne hemself to be so wise,
I schal thee telle in such a wise,
Wherof thou schalt ensample take
That thou no such thing undertake.

1.2251-2 RR wise – end of Trump of Death
“Thei schullen stonde.” And in this wise
The king hath with hise wordes wise
His brother tawht and al forgive.

1.2767-8 RR wise – Amans in conversation on vainglory

Thus am I gladed in this wise.
Bot, fader, of youre lores wise. . .
tell me. . .

1.3073-4 RR wise – Tale of Three Questions
Wherof he wolde in sondri wise
Opposen hem that weren wise

1.3223-4 RR wise – Tale of Three Questions
Arraied in hire beste wise
This maiden with hire wordes wise

1.3345-6 RR wise – Tale of Three Questions
And sche the king with wordes wise
Knelende thonketh in this wise. . .

2.307-8 RR wise – Travelers and the Angel
This angel with hise wordes wise
Opposeth hem in sondri wise

2.605-6 RR wise – Constance
And over that in such a wise
Sche hath hem with hire wordes wise
Of Cristes feith so full enformed,
That thei therto ben all conformed. . .
[being enformed is formative; it changes, converts]

2.2035-6 RR wise – Amans on how he acts around his lady
Ne liste ansuere in eny wise,
Bot feigne semblant as the wise

2.2673-4 RR wise False Bachelor
feigns gladness but his heart
Was al set in another wise.
These olde philosophers wise. . .

2.3247-8 RR wise – Constantine and Sylvester; emperor speaks with *rime riche* after
hearing crying children who do not want their blood shed for him; speaks of equality
of fate
The povere is bore as is the riche
And deieth in the same wise.
Upon the fol, upon the wise

3.2405-6 RR wise – Alexander and the Pirate
The king his hardi contenance

Behield, and herde hise wordes wise,
And seide unto him in this wise:
'Thin ansuere I have understonde,
Wherof my will is, that thou stonde
In mi service and stille abide.'
And forthwithal the same tide
He hath him terme of lif withholde,
The mor and for he schal ben holde. . .[loyal]

4.919-20 RR wise – Amans
Excuse me of necgligence
Towardes love in alle wise.
For thogh I be non of the wise. . .

4.2323-4 RR wise – Genius on idleness (6RR in speech)
Among the holi bokes wise
I finde write in such a wise

4.2453-4 RR wise – Genius on Discoverers and Inventors
The route of philosophers wise [company]
Controeveden be sondri wise

5.621-2 RR wise – Confessor on avarice; concluding couplet to his speech
As men mai finde be the lore
Of hem that whilom were wise,
Hou that thei spieke in many wise.

5.2057-8 RR wise – Virgil's Mirror
Hannibal set his heart
Upon knihthod in such a wise
That he be worthi and be wise
And be non othre was conseilled. . .

5.3103-4 RR wise – Achilles and Deidamia
Ulixes. . .
Which was on of the moste wise,
Ordeigned hath in such a wise. . .

5.7333-4 RR wise – Paris and Helen; narrator and Hector's opening line share RR
His tale tolde in such a wise,
And seide, "Lordes, ye ben wise. . ."

6.1901-2 RR wise – Nectanabus tells lady of his astrology
And feigneth with hise wordes wise
A tale, and seith in such a wise

7.183-4 RR wise - Mathematicians

Of this science; and in this wise
These olde philosophers wise. . .

7.1493-4 RR wise – Authors of Astronomy

Nou hast thou herd, in which a wise
These noble philosophres wise

7.2217-8 RR wise – Diogenes and Aristippus, first couplet

Among these othre tales wise
Of philosophres, in this wise
I rede. . .

7.2487-8 RR wise – Emperor and the Masons

So be ther manye, in such a wise
That feignen wordes to be wise

7.2543-4 RR wise – Ahab and Micaiah

He tok conseil in sondri wise,
Bot nocht of hem that weren wise.

7.3257v-8v RR wise – Tale of the Jew and the Pagan

And with his wordes slihe and wise
Unto the paien in this wise / He seide . . .

7.4157-8 RR wise – Wisdom and the King

It is ansuered in this wise,
That betre it is that thei be wise

8.371-2 RR wise – Tale of Apollonius

For lacke of ansuere in the wise, [according to the rules]
The remenant that weren wise. . . [remainder]

8.1649-50 RR wise - Apollonius

Tho was ther spoke in many wise
Amonges hem that weren wise

WISE / OTHERWISE or OTHER WISE (7)

5.1873-4 RR wise – Genius on Religion, Christians

Peter's ship
Transformed is in other wise.
Bot if thei weren gostli wise. . .

6.77-78 RR wise – Genius on drunkenness, especially of lovers
As for to speke it other wise,
It falleth that the moste wise
Ben otherwhile of love adoted

7.651-2 qRR wise / otherwise – Astronomy
Bot the divin seith otherwise,
That if men weren goode and wise

7.1614-1615 qRR wise / otherwise – Rhetoric
Bot Julius with wordes wise
His tale tolde al otherwise

7.2435-6 qRR wise / otherwise – Emperor and the Masons
. . . and otherwise
Thei were hemselven thanne wise

7.4379-80 RR wise – Cyrus and the Lydians
So as he seide in wordes wise,
Bot he thoghte al in other wise.

WISE / UNWISE (1 qRR)

5.741-2 qRR wise / unwise – Genius unwise/wise, third to last couplet in speech
before his big treatise on religion
In sondri place sondri wise
Amonges hem whiche are unwise

WONE (2)

3.149-150 RR wone – Canacee and Machaire
Whil thei be yonge, of comun wone [habitation]
In chambre thei togedre wone [dwelt]

5.467-468 RR wone – Genius on Jealousy of lovers
At hom if that a man wol wone, [dwell]
This fievere is thanne of comun wone [habit]

WYSE and WYSE / WISE (3)

ProL. 7-8 RR wyse – Gower at opening
Essampled of these olde wyse, [Exemplified by; wise men/books]
So that it myhte in such a wyse [manner]

4.1912-3 Nauplus and Ulysses – Laodomie’s letter begging Protheselai to stay
(suggests the RR is her rhetorical strategy, which king resists)

Hou sche hath axed of the wyse,
Touchende of him in such a wise,
That thei have don hire understonde,
Towardes othre hou so it stonde . . .
Be olde daies thanne hielden,
That thei non other thing behielden. [would consider]
And thus the fader for worschipe
Forth with his sone of felaschipe
Thurgh lust of armes weren dede. . .[love; slain]

4.2531-2 Confessor on alchemists and philosopher’s stone

So as the bokes it recorden,
The kinde of hem I schal recorden.
These olde Philosophers wyse
Be weie of kinde in sondri wise

WYLE / WHYLE (5) [not RR but included for sound play]

1.755-756 wyle/whyle

That thow hast wonne with thi wyle,
Thogh it thee like for a whyle

2.2475-6 (one over from weie/aweie) – Geta and Amphitriion

Wher that sche lay, and with a wyle
He contrefeteth for the whyle

2.2847-8 Pope Boniface

And therupon a wonder wyle
He wroghte: for at thilke whyle. . .

5.2053-4 Virgil’s Mirror (followed by wise RR)

Hannibal wanted to destroy the mirror
To overthrowe it be som wyle.
And Hanybal was thilke while
The prince. . .

8.534-535 while/wyle Apollonius; describes Antiochus

The king was sori for a while,
Bot whan he sih that with no wyle

WYTE (1)

7.5229-30 RR wyte – Tale of Virginia

Of that his brother hath the wyte [censure]
He was himselven for to wyte. [to be blamed]

WYTE / WHYTE (1) [included for sound play]

6.779 whyte/wyte – Amans on Delicacy (see RR faste and here)
He seth hire handes faire and whyte;
For al this thing without wyte [blame]

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