

**“THE WORD THIS WORLDES CAUSE ENTRIKETH”:
NEGOTIATING FALLEN SIGNS IN JOHN GOWER’S *CONFESSIO AMANTIS***

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE SCHOOL OF ENGLISH AT TRINITY COLLEGE,
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SUMMARY

This thesis argues that the *Confessio Amantis* is a study in the inadequacy of language and its constructs. It asserts that, like his fourteenth-century contemporary authors, Gower uses his poem to explore the mutable condition of language, the ambiguity of the sign, and the difficulties surrounding interpretation in a post-lapsarian world. This thesis is shaped by a combination of two things - new biographical evidence and a radical reassessment of the intellectual and philosophical framework of the *Confessio Amantis*.

I have discovered a previously unknown life-record in the British National Archives that places Gower in the murky and unstable world of medieval diplomacy, a realm decidedly reliant on the value and authority of the word. My research, builds on this transformative archival discovery and I contend that Gower's poetics is personally informed by this experiential engagement in the linguistically unreliable world of diplomacy and negotiations.

My second key innovation is to examine the *Confessio* and Gower's understanding of language through the lens of Augustinian sign theory. There has been no critical application of Augustinian thought, on this level, to Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, or his poetics in general. I primarily concentrate on Gower's critically understudied doctrinal and didactic passages of Book IV and Book VII, previously dismissed as irrelevant digressions that are extraneous to the main subject matter of the poem. I determine that Gower views the word as an Augustinian sign and, therefore, my first chapter offers a study of Augustine's semiotic hermeneutics present throughout almost all his works. I highlight the post-lapsarian nature of the sign as well as its corporeal and temporal aspects, further stressing the communicative and doctrinal function of Augustine's sign. Ultimately, due to its fallen nature, Augustine theorizes that nothing can be learned through signs, only more signs. I argue that he does not champion a redeemed speech, as Marcia Colish propounds, but on the contrary that, as a result of the post-lapsarian word, he turns away from the external sign altogether towards silence, an inward meditation, and the interior teacher of Christ that he correlates with truth. My second chapter focuses on Gower's passage on 'rhetoric' and the verbal sign in Book VII. I argue that it holds a central place in Gower's poetic revealing that, like Augustine, he views the 'word' as fallen, external, corrupted, and ambiguous. In my third chapter, I focus on Book IV and Gower's explication on the uses of labour. This section has

traditionally been viewed as a conventional and tedious enumeration of the founders of the arts as civilizing and positive forces. However, I show that Gower actually lists the history of the fall of language and the textual sign, portraying its decay from Hebrew to the vernacular and in turn offering up his own mutable and post-truth House of Fame. In my fourth chapter, I focus on Gower's protracted section on alchemy also occurring in Book IV. I argue that alchemy provides an analogy for Gower of the lost relationship between *signifier* and *signified*, inner and outer, and that language like the vanished golden-age art of alchemy, in the modern post-lapsarian world, is ineluctably duplicitous, fraudulent, and doomed to failure. In my fifth and final chapter, I focus on the frame of the entire poem highlighting that the culmination of Genius' moral instruction of Amans results merely in Amans' own construction of a rhyme royal love poem. This illustrates fully that Amans, ultimately, learns nothing throughout but more words. I offer a reading of this poem, then, as a confession without conversion, without reformation, a failure of the external sign to adequately represent and instruct moral truth that is further muddled by Gower's blending of 'lust and lore' (CA, Prologue, 19), fiction with fact. However, through an examination of the tale of Constance in Book II and the ending in Book VIII, I show that Gower, like Augustine, privileges the extra-verbal, and the poem consciously admonishes the reader (all words can do) to turn inward toward the self, to meditate through prayer as represented by the 'bedes blake' inscribed with por reposer (CA, VIII, 2904-907), and thus free themselves from the multitude of words and embrace the silence of inner truth. And like Augustine, who finally gives up his professorship of Rhetoric thereby withdrawing his 'tongue's service from the speech market' (Confessiones 9.2), Gower, the poet, silences himself and his pen by taking his 'final leve' (CA, VIII, 3152) of the art of verse-making 'for evere more' (CA, VIII, 3153).

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INTRODUCTION

POST-TRUTH

At the conclusion of 2016, the *Oxford English Dictionary* proclaimed ‘post-truth’ its ‘Word of the Year’, defining it as an adjective ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping political debate or public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.’¹ The *OED* clarifies further that ‘the prefix in post-truth has a meaning more like ‘belonging to a time in which the specified concept has become unimportant or irrelevant’. Though the phrase had first appeared about a decade earlier, the concurrent turbulent political discourse, in which the value of truth appeared to be overwhelmingly diminished, precipitated a ‘spike in frequency’² according to the *OED*’s blog. 2017 saw the advent of three new books with ‘post-truth’ in the title. Evan Davis declares that this is the year that we have ‘reached peak bullshit’³ whereas James Ball, finds that we effectively now live in a time where ‘bullshit has conquered the world’.⁴ And Matthew d’Ancona frames his argument in terms of a ‘new war on truth’.⁵ All these affirmations of the contemporary insinuate a recent past resembling a pre-lapsarian era where linguistic truth was vigorously revered and adhered to, but, while ‘post-truth’ is, itself, a twenty-first century neologism, the concept of a world at odds with verbal and textual truth, as we shall see, is not novel at all.

Over 750 years earlier, in the late thirteenth century, in Jean de Meun’s influential portion of *Le Roman de la Rose* (c.1275), the author imagines a profound disquisition between the allegorical characters Raison and Amant on the fractured relationship between ‘things’ and ‘signs’, names and their referents, viewed through the lens of linguistic obscenity. In a passage where Raison argues for the superiority of Love over Justice, she invokes the classical Ovidian mythological fall of man and decline of the Golden Age from *Metamorphoses* I. She says:

¹ *Oxford English Dictionary* ‘post-truth’ adj. (2).

² *Oxford English Dictionary Blog*, <<https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/word-of-the-year/word-of-the-year-2016>> [accessed August 12th 2017].

³ Evan Davis, *Post-Truth: Why We Have Reached Peak Bullshit and What We Can Do About It* (London: Little, Brown, 2017).

⁴ James Ball, *Post-Truth: How Bullshit Conquered the World* (London: Biteback Publishing, 2017).

⁵ Matthew d’Ancona, *Post-Truth: The New War on Truth and How to Fight Back* (London: Ebury Publishing, 2017).

Justice qui jadis regnoit,
Où tens que Saturne vivoit,
Cui Jupiter copa les coilles
Ausinc cum se fussent andoilles,
(Moult ot cil dur filz et amer)
Puis les geta dedens la mer,
Dont Venus la déesse issi
Car li Livres le dit ainsi:
S'ele iert en terre revenuë,
Et fust autresinc bien tenuë
Au jor-d'ui cum elle estoit lores,
Si seroit-il mestier encores
As gens entr'eus qu'il s'entr'amassent,
Combien que Justice gardassent:
Car puis qu'Amors s'en vodroit fuire,
Justice en feroit trop destruire;
Mais se les gens bien s'entr'amoient,
Jamès ne s'entreforferoient,
Et puis que forfait s'en iroit,
Justice de quoi serviroit? (RR, 5785-5804)⁶

⁶ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la Rose*, ed. Pierre Marteau, 4 Vols, 2nd Vol. (Paris: Herluison, 1878). All French text of *Le Roman de la Rose* is taken from this edition unless otherwise stated.

[Justice reigned formerly, in the days when Saturn held sway, Saturn whose son Jupiter cut off his testicles as though they were sausages (a harsh and bitter son indeed) and flung them into the sea, whence sprang the goddess Venus, as the book says. If Justice were to return to earth and were to be as highly regarded now as she was then, men would still need to love each other, however well they observed Justice, for as soon as Love fled, Justice would cause great destruction. But if men loved one another properly, they would never wrong each other, and when Crime departed, what use would Justice be?]⁷

Amant has no answer for Raison's question and so she offers up her own explanation, this time contrasting the harmony of an imagined idyllic past with the sinful decay of the contemporary world. She says:

Bien t'en croi: car pésible et coi
Tretuit cil du monde vivoient,
Jamès roi ne prince n'auroient;
Ne seroit baillif, ne prevost,
Tant seroit li pueple dévost.
Jamès juge n'orroit clamor:
Dont di-ge que miex vaut Amor
Simplement que ne fait Justice,
Tant aille-ele contre malice,
Qui fu mere des seignories
Dont les franchises sunt péries.

⁷ Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Frances Horgan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, repr. 2008). All English text of *The Romance of the Rose* is taken from this edition unless otherwise stated.

Car se ne fust mal et péchiés
Dont li mondes est entechiés,
L'en n'eüst onques roi véu,
Ne juge en terre congnéu. (RR, 5806-5820)

[I believe you, for everyone in the world would live peacefully and quietly. There would be no kings or princes, no bailiffs or provosts; people would thus live honestly and no judge would ever hear any clamour. That is why I say that Love by itself is worth more than Justice, although Justice combats Malice, mother of lordship, through who freedom has been lost. For had it not been for the crimes and sins with which the world is stained, no king would ever have been seen nor judge known upon earth.]

Raison swiftly moves from the fables of the poets to the biblical narrative of Genesis and the fall of man, resulting in the introduction of sin. By comparison, Raison shows that the present, with its abundance of monarchs, emperors, leaders, lawyers and judges, is a tainted post-lapsarian world of sin. But Amant, the Lover, has lost interest in the content of Raison's speech by this stage and, instead, finds himself shocked by 'une parole / Si esbaléurée et fole' [a word so shameless and outrageous] (RR, 5963). Amant complains bitterly to Raison, saying that the word she uttered is inexcusable and indefensible. But despite Amant's rude interruption, Raison persists with her lengthy discourse, which now has turned to the topic of Fortune, only to be reproached once again for her obscene language. At the end of her sermon we finally learn from Amant what word has caused such an affront to his sensibilities. After dismissing the entirety of what he has heard he remarks that he will never give up the pursuit of the rose and says:

Si ne vous tieng mie à cortoise,
Quant ci m'avés coilles nomées,
Qui ne sunt pas bien renomées

En bouche à cortoise pucele.
Vous qui tant estes saige et bele,
Ne sai comment nomer l'osastes,
Au mains quant le mot ne glosastes
Par quelque cortoise parole,
Si cum prode fame parole.
Sovent voi néis ces norrices,
Dont maintes sunt baudes et nices,
Quant lor enfant lavent et baingnent,
Qu'el les debaisent et aplainnent,
Si les nomment-el autrement. (RR, 7219-32)

[Also, I do not think it was courteous of you to pronounce the word “testicles”: no well-bred girl should call them by their name. I do not know how you dared name them, you who are so wise and fair, without at least glossing the word with some courteous utterance, as a virtuous woman would when speaking of them. I often see even nurses, many of whom are bawdy and ignorant, who when they hold and bathe their charges, fondling and caressing them, use other names for those parts.]

Raison responds to the accusation with a smile, saying that it is well within her remit to name anything good openly and plainly by its proper name. Indeed, she says, she is not ashamed of anything that is not sinful adding that she has never sinned in her life. She continues:

N'encor ne fais-ge pas pechié,
Se ge nome sans metre gloses

Par plain texte les nobles choses
Que mes peres en paradis
Fist de ses propres mains jadis;
Et tous les autres estrumens
Qui sont piliers et argumens
A soustenir nature humaine,
Qui sans eus fust et casse et vaine.
Car volentiers, non pas envis,
Mist Diex en coilles et en vits
Force de generacion,
Par merveilleuse entencion,
Por l'espece avoir tous jors vive
Par renovelance naïve. (RR, 7246-7260)

[And it is not sinful of me to name, in plain and unglossed language, the noble things that my heavenly father formerly made with his own hands together with all the other instruments, the pillars and arguments by which human nature is sustained and without which it would now be empty and decayed. For it was by his own will rather than against it that God in his wonderful purpose put the generative power into the testicles and penis in order that the race would live forever, renewed by new births]

Amant ripostes that God may have made the things but he did not make the names. He upbraids Raison once more calling her a loose and foolish woman for engaging in such bawdy talk (RR, 7269-76). Raison is compelled to defend herself and tells Amant that her father, God, taught her those words properly and 'sans metre gloses' [without glossing them] (RR, 7372). It was God who gave Raison the power to name things which she did

as she pleased. She likes to find names that are ‘proprement et comunement’ [proper and common] so as to ‘crasitre nostre entendement’ [increase our understanding] (RR, 73785-86). Raison impatiently adds:

Et quant tu d'autre part obices
Que lait et vilain sunt li mot,
Ge te di devant Diex qui m'ot,
Se ge, quant mis les noms as choses,
Que ci reprendre et blasmer oses,
Coilles reliques apelasse,
Et reliques coilles clamasse,
Tu qui si m'en mors et depiques,
Me redéisses de reliques
Que ce fust lais mos et vilains.
Coilles est biaux mos, et si l'ains;
Si sunt par foi coillon et vit,
Onc nus plus biaux gaires ne vit.
Ge fis les mos, et sui certaine
Qu'onques ne fis chose vilaine (RR, 7398-412)

[And if you object on the other hand that the words are ugly and base, I tell you before God who hears men that if, when I gave things names that you dare find fault with and condemn, I had called testicles relics and relics testicles, then you who thus attack and reproach me would tell me instead that relics was an ugly, base, word. “Testicles” is a good name and I like it and so, in faith, are “testes” and “penis”; none more beautiful have

ever been seen. I made the words and I am certain that I never made anything base]

Euphemism is a matter of habit, of custom, Raison further tells Amant. Names must be used out of necessity in order to call things by their names. Women call them all sorts of different names such as ‘Borces, hernois, riens, piches, pines, / Ausinc cum se fussent espines’ [purses, harness, things, torches, pricks, as though they were thorns] (RR, 7349-50). She says that they may call them whatever they like ‘Quant proprement nomer nes vuelent’ [if they don’t want to give them their proper names] (RR, 7445). Raison then closes her speech, unexpectedly, by declaring that ‘Si ne doit l'en mie tout prendre / A la letre quanque l'en ot’ (RR, 7454-55) [not everything one hears should be taken literally] and that her use of the word ‘coilles’, in fact, has a different meaning to the one Amant perceives it as (RR, 7456-460). She further remarks that if Amant understood the text’s meaning properly then it would clarify any obscurities (RR, 7461-64). Raison gives the example of ‘Les argumens as grans poëtes’ [the integuments of the great poets] where truth is concealed until explicated further (RR, 7466-67). She tells him that ‘Car en lor gieus et en lor fables / Gisent profit moult delitables, / Sous qui lor pensées covrirent, / Quant le voir des fables ovrirent’ [for there are most profitable delights in the entertaining fables of the poets who thus covered their thoughts when they clothed the truth in fables] (RR, 7475-78). She says that this is the way to read her fable of Saturn’s castration if he wants to understand her words properly.

What these passages highlight is the irredeemable chasm between divine language and fallen human language. In Eden, names signified accurately the things that they referred to. There was a perfect relationship between *signum* [sign] and *res* [thing]. Per Nykrog observes that Raison is ‘a being who is close to God, in prelapsarian innocence’⁸ and D.W. Robertson Jr writes similarly the she is ‘Lady Philosophy who is described by Guillaume as the Image of God’.⁹ So, when Raison tells us that God used ‘proper’ words, she is referring to the idea of names that are divinely aligned, in unflawed signification, with their referents. A perfect harmony that she herself practices with her ‘plain speech’.

⁸ Per Nykrog, ‘Obscene or Not Obscene: Lady Reason, Jean de Meun, and the Fisherman from Pont-sur-Seine’, in *Obscenity: Social Control and Artistic Creation in the European Middle Ages*, ed. Jan Ziolkowski (Leiden: Brill, 1998), pp.319-31, p.320.

⁹ D.W. Robertson Jr, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1962), p.199.

On the other hand, Amant, represents all the problems inherent with post-lapsarian language. As John Fyler points out ‘In the Garden of Eden, Nature did not need to be hidden, and obscenity was impossible’.¹⁰ Amant’s instinctive rush to cover the term ‘coilles’ [testicles] is symptomatic of man’s post-lapsarian state just as Adam and Eve did when they concealed their genitals with fig leaves. But crucially as David Hult argues ‘Reason’s own position is seriously compromised by the irony of her inability to comprehend man’s condition after the Fall, including its direct linguistic result, the appearance of obscenity’.¹¹ Fyler concurs writing further that ‘Reason’s discourse contains within it the signs of its own failings’ and points out that when Raison says that God gave her the power to name things as she pleases ‘quant il me plect’ (RR, 7372) she is saying she names *ad placitum*, that is arbitrarily.¹² Raison is symbolic of human reason and not divine reason and, therefore, she is subject to the Fall herself. Naming *ad placitum* is ‘a defining characteristic of the fallen world, after the Adamic language has disappeared and after the diffusion of languages at the Tower of Babel’.¹³ Indeed, ‘the names [Raison] invents are of necessity arbitrary and interchangeable, divorced from the integral relation of word and thing in the Adamic language’.¹⁴ She may speak of things by their ‘proper names’ or ‘speak plainly of things’ without gloss, or name the genitals as she does all other things ‘properly’, but true proper names no longer exist, and her invented words are by their very nature a gloss, nothing but a metaphor.¹⁵ Only God has the power of true names in a post-lapsarian world. And human words, in the fallen world, have no ability to signify true reality. Therefore, all words are exchangeable and as the women who use euphemisms such as ‘purses’, ‘things’, and ‘torches’ show, it is only through convention that temporal agreements can be made regarding meaning. Thus, Raison’s ‘plain speech’ is, in actuality, no closer to redeeming true signification than if she had employed shame obscuring euphemisms.

This point is further illustrated through Raison’s allusion to the integuments of the great poets. Fyler tells us that ‘integument, translation, and the metaphorical are

¹⁰ John Fyler, *Language and Declining World in Chaucer, Dante, and Jean de Meun* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.80.

¹¹ David Hult, ‘Language and Dismemberment: Abelard, Origen, and the *Romance of the Rose*’, in *Rethinking the Romance of the Rose*, eds Kevin Brownlee and Sylvia Huot (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania, 1992), pp.101-30, p.109.

¹² Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.93.

¹³ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.95.

¹⁴ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.94.

¹⁵ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.94.

themselves linguistic symptoms of the fallen world'.¹⁶ Jill Mann points out that while he justifies the 'clothing' of meaning with fictions, Macrobius tells us, in his *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, that not all forms of fable are worthy.¹⁷ He writes:¹⁸

Fables - the very word acknowledges their falsity and serve two purposes: either merely to gratify the ear or to encourage the reader to good works. They delight the ear as do the comedies of Menander and his imitators, or the narratives replete with imaginary doings of lovers in which Petronius Arbiter so freely indulged and with which Apuleius, astonishingly, sometimes amused himself. This whole category of fables that promises only to gratify the ear a philosophical treatise avoids and relegates to children's nurseries.¹⁹

Of the second group of fables, Macrobius writes that they:²⁰

[Draw] the reader's attention to certain kinds of virtue, [and] are divided in [to] two types. In the first both the setting and plot are fictitious as in the fables of Aesop, famous for his exquisite imagination. The second rests on a solid foundation of truth, which is treated in a fictitious style. This is called the fabulous narrative to distinguish it from the ordinary

¹⁶ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.93.

¹⁷ Jill Mann, 'Jean de Meun and the Castration of Saturn', in *Poetry and Philosophy in the Middle Ages: A Festschrift for Peter Dronke*, ed. John Marenbon (Leiden: Brill, 2001), pp.309-326, p.319.

¹⁸ 'Fabulae, quarum nomen indicat falsi professionem, aut tantum conciliandae auribus uoluptatis aut adhortationis quoque in bonam frugem gratia repertae sunt. auditum mulcent uelut comoediae, quales Menander eiusque imitatores agendas dederunt, uel argumenta fictis casibus amatorum referta, quibus uel multum se Arbiter exercuit uel Apuleium non numquam luisse miramur. hoc totum fabularum genus quod solas aurium delicias profitetur e sacrario suo in nutricum cunas sapientiae tractatus eliminat.' Macrobius, *Commentariorum in Somnium Scipionis*, ed. Franciscus Eyssenhardt (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1893). I.2.7-8. All Latin text comes from this edition.

¹⁹ Macrobius, *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William Harris Stahl (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), I.2.7-8. All English text comes from this edition.

²⁰ 'ex his autem quae ad quamdam uirtutum speciem intellectum legentis hortantur fit secunda discretio. in quibusdam enim et argumentum ex ficto locatur et per mendacia ipse relationis ordo contexitur ut sunt illae Aesopi fabulae elegantia fictionis illustres, at in aliis argumentum quidem fundatur ueri soliditate sed haec ipsa ueritas per quaedam composita et ficta profertur et hoc iam uocatur narratio fabulosa, non fabula, ut sunt caeremoniarum sacra, ut Hesiodi et Orphei quae de deorum progenie actuae narrantur, ut mystica Pythagoreorum sensa referuntur' (I.2.9).

fable; examples of it are the performances of sacred rites, the stories of Hesiod and Orpheus that treat of the ancestry of deed so the gods and the mystic conceptions of the Pythagoreans. (I.2.9)

The first group, he writes, are also inappropriate for use in philosophy and names, in particular, fables that are exceedingly similar to Reason's: 'either the presentation of the plot involves matters that are base and unworthy of divinities and are monstrosities of some sort (as for example, gods caught in adultery, Saturn cutting off the privy parts of his father Caelus and himself thrown into chains by his son and successor), a type which philosophers prefer to disregard altogether' (I.2.11).²¹ St Augustine, as we shall see in Chapter One, vehemently objects to the use of fables to explain moral truths. In *De civitate Dei*, he mocks the ancient Roman writer Varro's allegorical interpretations of the stories of pagan gods, accusing him of peddling untruths. In so doing, he highlights an analogous Saturnian castration tale:²²

And whereas it is said in the fables that Saturn castrated his father Cœlus, this signifies, says Varro, that the divine seed belongs to Saturn, and not to Cœlus; for this reason, as far as a reason can be discovered, namely, that in heaven nothing is born from seed. But, lo! Saturn, if he is the son of Cœlus, is the son of Jupiter. For they affirm times without number, and that emphatically, that the heavens are Jupiter. Thus those things which come not of the truth, do very often, without being impelled by any one, themselves overthrow one another.²³

²¹ 'aut enim contextio narrationis per turpia et indigna numinibus ac monstro similia componitur ut di adulteri, Saturnus pudenda Caeli patris abscindens et ipse rursus a filio regno potito in uincla coniectus, quod genus totum philosophi nescire malun' (I.2.11).

²² 'Saturnus castrasse in fabulis dicitur, hoc significat penes Saturnum, non penes Caelum semen esse divinum Hoc propterea, quantum intellegi datur, quia nihil in caelo de seminibus nascitur. Sed ecce, Saturnus si Caeli est filius, Iovis est filius. Caelum enim esse Iovem innumerabiliter et diligenter affirmant. Ita ista, quae a veritate non veniunt, plerumque et nullo impellente se ipsa subvertunt'. St Augustine, *De civitate Dei contra Paganos libri*, PL41, VII.19, <<http://www.augustinus.it/latino/cdd/index2.htm>> [accessed September 29th 2017]. All Latin text taken from this edition unless otherwise stated.

²³ St Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, 1st Series, Vol. 2 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887), VII.19. All English text comes from this edition unless otherwise stated.

It seems, then, that pagan fables and specifically those that involve castration of gods constitute unsuitable content for moral and philosophical didacticism. Amant's narrow fixation on the sexual organs, this single word 'coilles' [testicles], fully demonstrates his complete inability to perceive any moral *sentence* beyond this aspect. Amant has become obsessively distracted by the lurid, gratifyingly lusty, secular parts of the fable and is unwilling, and unable, to glean allegorically any moral truth from it. And Raison's 'plain speech' does nothing, though she claims otherwise, to uncover or de-clothe the mysterious integument of the fable. Her attempts at clarity through allegory have failed. All language is integument. As Mann has shown, the castration myth of Saturn has, over the millennia, had numerous different allegorical interpretations and there appears to be no stable universal truth underlying the meaning of the fable.²⁴ Therein lies the problem and this is what Jean is demonstrating in these passages. As Augustine believed before him, Jean shows that the fable's lack of truth, its fluidity of meaning subject to temporal conventions, is problematic, making it unworthy to reveal unchangeable moral truths. Thus, Raison fails to teach Amant anything and the chapter concludes with the Lover declaring that he has no interest in Raison's interpretation and in dismissing her moves his focus from 'coilles' to the 'rose'.

In the late fourteenth century, Chaucer, a reader and translator of *Le Roman de la Rose*, in his own dream-vision the *House of Fame* describes a whirling wicker cage where all words expressed in the world, verbal or textual, true or false, eventually wend their way, where they ultimately become indiscernible from each other. He writes of 'scrippes bret-ful of lesinges, / Entremedled with tydynges' (HoF, 2123-4) and 'Curroures, and eke messagers, / With boystes crammed ful of lyes' (HoF, 2128-9).²⁵ In his balade *Lak of Stedfastnesse*, directly addressed to King Richard II, he protests his own 'post-truth' era:

Sometyme the world was so stedfast and stable

That mannes word was obligacioun,

²⁴ Jill Mann, 'Jean de Meun and the Castration of Saturn', pp. 313-323.

²⁵ Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987, repr. 2008), 3rd Edition. All Chaucer quotations come from this edition unless otherwise stated.

And now it is so fals and deceivable
That word and deed, as in conclusioun,
Ben nothing lyk, for turned up-so-doun
Is al this world for mede and wilfulnesse,
That al is lost for lak of stedfastnesse (1-7)

This is by far his most un-Chaucerian poem, yet his most remarkably Gowerian in both theme and form. In a possible direct nod to Raison's attempted teaching of Amant through the failed use of the fable form, Chaucer begins the third verse declaring that 'Trouthe is put doun, resoun is holden fable' (LoS, 15). Chaucer's brief lines convey the message that King Richard's England has been 'conquered by bullshit', is now a bastion of 'post-truth'. He writes further that 'The world hath mad a permutacioun / Fro right to wrong, fro trouthe to fikelnesse' (LoS, 17-18). In another short poem *Chaucers Wordes Unto Adam, his Owne Scriveyn*, he demonstrates that not only verbal truth has decayed in his modern day Ricardian England but textual truth as well.²⁶ He bitterly complains of the textual transgressions of his scribe Adam writing 'But after my makyng thow wryte more trewe; / So ofte adaye I mot thy werk renewe / It to correcte and eke to rubbe and scrape, / And al is thorough thy negligence and rape' (CWUA, 4-7). And unsurprisingly then, we find that John Gower, too, in his *Confessio Amantis*, sorely laments the loss of truth in his contemporary world by contrasting it with an ideal golden age past where 'The word was lich to the conceite / Withoute semblant of deceite' (CA, Prologue, 113-114).²⁷

²⁶ Following in the footsteps of A.S.G. Edwards, Eric Weiskott has recently cast doubt on Chaucer's authorship of the poem in 'Adam Scriveyn and Chaucer's metrical practice', *Medium Aevum*, 86.1, (2017), 147-151.

²⁷ John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell Peck, 3. Vols (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003). All *Confessio* quotations come from this edition.

THE DIPLOMATIC MUSE

John Gower's (c.1330-1408) position in this unstable 'post-truth' world is, regrettably, replete with unknowns. There is still exceptionally little knowledge about his life and as G.C. Macaulay observes 'To write anything like a biography of Gower, with the materials that exist, is an impossibility'²⁸ and, indeed, 'what we have paints a considerably less colourful picture'.²⁹ Although we can ascertain that he enjoyed a literary career that spanned two centuries and that of three kings: Edward III, Richard II, and Henry IV,³⁰ we have no firm birthdate for him. Nor can we say for certain where he was born. He may have come from a Kentish family or even a Yorkshire one. John Leland, in the sixteenth century connected Gower to the Stittenham's in Yorkshire³¹ but John Weever, in the mid seventeenth century, observed that the arms on Gower's tomb in St. Mary Overy were the same as that on the tomb of a Sir Robert Gower in Brabourne, Kent.³² From this, Macaulay maintained that John Gower was first and foremost a Kentish poet, even finding traces of a Kentish dialect throughout his poetry.³³ And John Hurt Fisher has most recently argued that it was most likely that Sir Robert Gower was related to the Langbargh Gowers with which John Gower the poet, possibly his younger brother or nephew, also belonged.³⁴

John Gower first appears in a record dated 16th of July 1364 in a now infamous account known as the Septvans affair.³⁵ This affair, which caused Macaulay to call Gower 'a villainous misleader of youth'³⁶, involved Gower's acquisition of the manor of Aldington Septvauns from William Septvauns, who at the time was a royal ward. It seems that Gower paid a nominal price for the manor and because of that suspicions were raised.

²⁸John Gower, *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G.C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), 4 Vols, Vol. IV: *The Latin Works*, p.vii.

²⁹ John Hines, Nathalie Cohen, Simon Roffey, 'Iohannes Gower, Armiger, Poeta: Records and Memorials of his Life and Death', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Siân Echard (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004), pp.23-42, p.23.

³⁰ We know this because of an epitaph on his tomb that was recorded in the late seventeenth century that states he lived through the reigns of Edward III and Richard II, though curiously there is no mention of Henry IV. Richard Rawlinson, *The Natural History and Antiquities of the County of Surrey: Begun in the Year 1673, By John Aubrey Esq; F.R.S. and Continued to the Present Time*, 5 Vols (London: 1718-19), V., pp.202-5.

³¹ John Leland, *Commentarii Scriptoribus Britannicis* (Oxford: 1709), p.414.

³² John Weever, *Ancient Funerall Monuments* (London: 1631), p.68.

³³ Macaulay, *The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p.x.

³⁴ John Hurt Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York, NY: New York University Press, 1964), pp.37-69.

³⁵ *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, Edward III, Vol. XI (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1935).

³⁶ Macaulay, *The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p.xv.

Lord John Cobham, who owned the connecting manor of Aldington Cobham, asserted that the deal was fraudulent because, at the time of the sale, William was underage. An inquisition was launched in 1364 and the commission who sat in Canterbury in 1366 ruled that William had indeed been a minor and the transaction was voided.³⁷ Gower was unceremoniously called before the Chancery but surprisingly his claim to the manor was eventually adjudged as just and he regained moiety of Aldington³⁸, which he curiously sold in 1373 to the very same John Cobham along with Thomas de Brockhull.³⁹ This initiates a litany of further financial and property transaction records until his final record, the execution of his will, in October 1408.⁴⁰ This was proved by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel, and his wife, Agnes Gower whom he married in 1398 and was executrix and named as his sole heir.⁴¹

Both Matthew Giancarlo⁴² and Sebastian Sobceki interpret this favourable outcome for Gower in the Septvauns affair as evidence of his superior legal prowess.⁴³ The idea that Gower was a lawyer had long been advanced by Leland⁴⁴, though Macaulay dismisses his assertion as based on mere conjecture and argues, instead, that he was most likely a merchant.⁴⁵ Certainly Gower's lengthy and heated invective against the fraudulent practitioners of law in the *Mirour de l'Omme* would suggest he, himself, was not part of that particular profession. John Hurt Fisher, on the other hand, deduces from the following lines found in the *Mirour* that he did, in fact, hold a legal or civil office: 'je ne suy pas clers, / Vestu de sanguin ne de pers, / Ainz ai vestu la raye mance / Poy sai latin, poy sai romance'⁴⁶ [because I am not a cleric clothed in scarlet and blue, but I have

³⁷ *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, Edward III, Vol. XII (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1938).

³⁸ *Rotuli Parliamentorum*, II. 292-293.

³⁹ *Harleian Charters*, 50. 1.14.

⁴⁰ Latin text of Gower's will is held at Lambeth Palace Library, London, Register of Thomas Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, Vol.1, fols. 256r-257r. It was written on August 15th 1408 and proved on October 24th 1408.

⁴¹ Gower's marriage license can be found in *Wykeham's Register*, ed. Thomas F. Kirby, 2. Vols, Hampshire Record Society, Vol. 12, Parts 1-2 (London and Winchester: Simpkin and Co., 1896-9), Part 2, p.477.

⁴² Matthew Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp.9-112, p. 95. See also Matthew Giancarlo, 'The Septvauns Affair, Purchase, and Parliament in John Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme*,' *Viator*, 36 (2005), 435-64.

⁴³ Sebastian Sobceki, 'A Southwark Tale: Gower, the 1381 Poll Tax, and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*,' *Speculum*, 92/3, (July 2017), 630-659 (p.632).

⁴⁴ Leland, *Commentarii Scriptoribus Britannicis*, p.415.

⁴⁵ John Gower, *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols, Vol. I: The French Works, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), pp.lxii-lxiii.

⁴⁶ John Gower, *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 1:246. All Anglo-Norman quotations from the *Mirour* are taken from this edition.

worn only striped sleeves - I know little Latin and little French] (MO, 21772-75).⁴⁷ He uncovers an image of the Court of Chancery from a fifteenth-century manuscript that appears to show serjeants-at-law and clerks of the Chancery wearing vestments where one half of the garment is striped, either diagonally or vertically.⁴⁸ Sobecki extrapolates from this same image, the direct contrast between the scarlet and blue of the canon lawyers, as outlined in the *Mirour*, with the striped blue-and-green gowns of the serjeants-at-law and Chancery barristers.⁴⁹ Yet, in this image the men wear striped half vestments not just *rayed* sleeves, as Gower clearly only refers to, and so we must be cautious in saying they are one and the same. It may simply mean that Gower is referring to himself as a layman, in opposition to the clergy, and his garments part of a civil livery. R.F. Yeager argues that Fisher has ‘stretched’ the ‘rayed sleeves’ inference and writes that ‘subsequent hands have gradually allowed this inference to strengthen, so that most nowadays would easily concur with John Hines, Nathalie Cohen, and Simon Roffey, who recently deemed it “highly plausible that part of the younger Gower’s education would have taken place in the Inns of Court of London [...] and that Gower pursued a legal career”’.⁵⁰ He declares that there is, in fact, no ‘credible evidence in hand that proves Gower ever practiced, or received formal training in, the law’.⁵¹

Yet, despite Yeager’s conclusions about the highly speculative nature of Gower’s profession, Sobecki continues to firmly argue that Gower was indeed a trained lawyer with links to the Chancery as Fisher had earlier intimated. He has most recently offered up four records from the Court of Common Pleas as evidence of this. The first item dates from 1396 and has John Gower submit ‘in propria persona’ [in his proper person] a plea of account against Thomas Forester and John Gay in connection with Gower’s manor in Feltwell. The remaining new documents all date from 1399. The second document is a plea of debt against Walter Clerk from Little Cressingham, near Gower’s Feltwell manor and later that year Gower entered a second plea of debt against this debtor, only this time it is stated that he was represented by an attorney ‘per attornatem’. The fourth document is a plea of debt against William Fisher and his wife Denise, both from Shropham, some

⁴⁷ John Gower, *Mirour de l’Omme*, trans. William Burton Wilson (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1992), p.291. All English translations from the *Mirour* are taken from this edition.

⁴⁸ Fisher, *John Gower*, p.55.

⁴⁹ Sobecki, ‘A Southwark Tale’, pp.633-35.

⁵⁰ R.F. Yeager, ‘John Gower’s Poetry and the “Lawyerly Habit of Mind”’, in *Theorizing Legal Personhood in Late Medieval England*, ed. Andrea D. Boboc (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp.71-93, p.72.

⁵¹ Yeager, ‘John Gower’s Poetry’, p.73.

eighteen miles from Feltwell. Sobecki points to Matthew Irvin's highlighting of the phrase 'in propria persona'⁵², which Gower makes use of in Chapter 16 and 17 of the *Visio Angliae* (which constitutes Book I of his *Vox Clamantis*) and further argues that Gower's appearance in court 'in propria persona' is strong proof of Gower's legal profession. However, I find it somewhat of a leap to suggest that these exceptionally common and rather ordinary debt pleas in any way constitute real evidence of Gower's lawyerly skill or trained legal status and I am not particularly convinced that Gower was practicing as such so late in his life. Sobecki himself dates Gower's blindness as occurring between October 1399 and May 1400.⁵³ Sobecki is absolutely correct, however, that his findings are the first tangible connection of the term 'in propria persona' with Gower, but the pleas themselves are personal actions and legally uncomplicated. Every instance of 'in propria persona', of which there are almost as many as 'per attornatem' [by attorney] in the Common Plea records, does not denote that the claimant/defendant is a lawyer but rather that he is in the court in person and not absently represented by his attorney.⁵⁴

I have discovered a completely new and unknown life-record that centrally places Gower not in the world of law, but in the murky and duplicitous world of diplomacy. Thus for the first time we can eschew conjecture and once and for all conclusively connect Gower to a concrete sphere of employment. This particular archival record is a letter of safe-conduct for John Gower and Alan de Meyne, described as emissaries 'nuncios' of the Duke of Brittany to enter England on King's business for one month dated the 19th of September 1381.⁵⁵ It is found in the Chancery Treaty Rolls, otherwise known as the 'French Rolls', which are held in the National Archives.⁵⁶ Brittany was, in the late fourteenth century, an independent principality. In 1341 then Duke John III died without naming any heirs. Consequently, between the years of 1341 and 1365, the 'War of the Breton Succession' was fought between the Counts of Blois and the Montforts of Brittany. The succession crisis soon became an integral part of the Hundred Years' War which had broken out several years earlier in 1337. France backed Charles de Blois, a

⁵² Matthew Irvin, *The Poetic Voices of John Gower: Politics and Personae in the Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014), p.4.

⁵³ Sebastian Sobecki, "'Ecce patet tensus": The Trentham Manuscript, In Praise of Peace, and John Gower's Autograph Hand,' *Speculum*, 90/4 (2015), 925-59 (pp.951-59).

⁵⁴ Some of the rolls for Richard II are digitized here <<http://aalt.law.uh.edu/RichardII.html>>. I have gone through most of these and there appears to be two states for any claimant either 'in propria persona' or 'per attornatem'. This is for all those I have checked in the Ricardian years. See Sobecki, 'A Southwark Tale'.

⁵⁵ See Appendix A. All quotations come from my transcription and translation found in Appendix A.

⁵⁶ Chancery: Treaty Rolls, C76, Richard II, 1381, *National Archives*.

powerful French noble who married Joan of Penthièvre who claimed she was rightful heir, and the English under Edward III put their weight behind Jean of Montfort. However, Charles was killed in 1364 at the Battle of Auray and his widow Joan of Penthièvre conceded her claim. Thus in 1365 Jean became recognised as Duke Jean IV of Brittany. However due to continued hostilities he was unable to fully reside in Brittany until 1379, though his wife, Joan Holland, remained in her home of England until 1382 when she unwillingly made the trip to Brittany only to die shortly afterwards in 1384.

It may seem unusual at first that the Duke would employ an English envoy. It seems likely that Alan de Meyne was a Breton as he is named ‘Receiver General of Brittany’ in a later document.⁵⁷ However, another unknown record I have found in the National Archives shows a second letter of safe conduct for Gower’s companion Alan de Meyne travelling a few years later in 1384, again as ‘nunciis’ [emissaries] of the Duke, with Richard Clerk who appears to be an Englishman.⁵⁸ According to Michael Jones, Richard Clerk had the good fortune to rise to the rank of Secretary to the Duke.⁵⁹ And in an earlier record, which I have also discovered, John de Hatfield, who in a petition to Edward III in 1373 requests a pardon for the death of another man, is also named as the servant of the Duke of Brittany.⁶⁰ He additionally appears to be an Englishman - his name literally means from the town of Hatfield in West Riding, Yorkshire. In a series of archival records that I have located, John de Hatfield appeared to be a very wealthy London citizen and ‘pepperer’ [pepper merchant].⁶¹ To add to this, Michael Jones has found that the Duke of Brittany’s first treasurer was, in fact, also an Englishman.⁶²

⁵⁷ Guy Alexis Lobineau, *Histoire de Bretagne: Composée Sur Les Titres & Les Auteurs Originaux* (Paris: Louis Geurin, 1707), Vol. 2, p.633.

⁵⁸ Chancery: Treaty Rolls, C76, Richard II, 1384, *National Archives*. Another document details a petition to King Richard II in 1385 taken by both Alan de Meyne and Richard Clerk claiming that their goods were stolen while staying in Devon in Ancient Petitions, SC 8/213/10649 *National Archives*. Clerk appears to be an English surname, as in Gower’s debtor William Clerk in Sobeci’s documents, and he may be the same Richard Clerk who endorsed the certificate by the Sheriff in the ruling on the Septvauns affair, *Calendar of Inquisitions Post Mortem*, Edward III, 1366.

⁵⁹ Michael Jones, *The Creation of Brittany: A Late Medieval State* (London: The Hambledon Press, 1988), p.136.

⁶⁰ Ancient Petitions, SC 8/227/11338, Edward III, 1373, *National Archives*.

⁶¹ Chancery: Certificates of Statute Merchant and Statute Staple, C 241/140/87, Edward III, 1360; Chancery: Extents for Debts, Series I, C 131/11/1, Edward III, 1358; Chancery: Certificates of Statute Merchant and Statute Staple, C 241/138/183, Edward III, 1358; Chancery: Extents for Debts, Series I, C 131/12/9, Edward III, 1360; Chancery: Extents for Debts, Series IC 131/182/18, Edward III, 1360. All from the *National Archives*.

⁶² Michael Jones, ‘The English Career and Connections of William de Sonde Treasurer of Brittany (d.1368)’, in *Corona Monastica, moines bretons de Landévennec: histoire et mémoire celtiques*, eds Louis Lemoine and Bernard Merdrignac (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2004), pp.311-19, p.311.

According to Jones, William de Sonde had a double career and served at the same time as rector in his parish of East Tilbury in Essex, London.⁶³ Sonde is recorded taking many trips to Brittany and back to London on behalf of the Duke.⁶⁴ Sonde's parish church was sold sometime after his death in 1368 to none other than Lord John Cobham, a known associate of Gower's, who built his college, Cobham College, on the site.⁶⁵ So it appears that Jean IV had many English servants in his circle. This is not at all surprising since he was known as a great Anglophile.⁶⁶ Jean, in fact, grew up in England in the court of Edward III and in the household of Philippa of Hainault. He married Mary Plantagenet, John of Gaunt's sister, and the King's daughter.⁶⁷ This made him the King's son-in-law during the war of succession. We even find a Kentish connection through his second wife Joan Holland, who was the daughter of Thomas Holland and Joan of Kent, future wife of Edward the Black Prince and mother of Richard II. Another English connection finally comes, albeit posthumously, through his last wife Joan of Navarre, who after Jean's death married Henry IV becoming Queen of England.

Jean was criticised for surrounding himself so closely with English staff and advisors by the local Breton aristocracy and he was eventually forced to remove them altogether in the wake of an emergent Breton nationalism.⁶⁸ Furthermore, in 1372 Jean IV had bestowed on him the title of the Earl of Richmond which came with lands in Yorkshire and he became the first foreign leader to become a Knight of the Garter in 1374. In return he allowed the English to run military affairs from the strategic castle at Brest. Duke Jean IV was essentially a vassal of the King of England, and it was important for the English to keep it as such given their geographically beneficial position during the Hundred Years' War.

At this particular time in 1381, Jean had just recently taken up residency full time in Brittany and was beginning to reassert his authority in the region after his long exile in England. He had in 1380, unbeknownst to the English, made an alliance with France

⁶³ Jones, 'William de Sonde', p.312.

⁶⁴ Jones, 'William de Sonde', p.313.

⁶⁵ Jones, 'William de Sonde', p.313.

⁶⁶ Gerald Harriss, *Shaping the Nation: England 1360-1461* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), p.407.

⁶⁷ Diane E. Booton, *Manuscripts, Market and the Transition to Print in Late Medieval Brittany* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), p.137.

⁶⁸ Michael Jones, *Ducal Brittany, 1364-1399: relations with England and France during the reign of Duke John IV* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), pp.123-4.

which according to Froissart's Chronicle had 'greatly enraged' the English.⁶⁹ This destabilised their own alliance with Brittany during a time of extended war. It is under these frostier circumstances that Gower is dispatched as the Duke's envoy to discuss matters of great importance with King Richard II. Indeed, this may even be the first record of an actual meeting between Gower and Richard II outside of his account of their chance meeting on the Thames in his Prologue to the *Confessio Amantis*. Of further note, is that when Henry of Bolingbroke, future King of England, and literary patron of Gower, was exiled in 1398 by Richard II he found asylum in the court of Brittany. From this, we may hold the conjecture that this arrangement possibly came about through Gower's own Bretonic network and, therefore, he may have even had a hand in facilitating Henry's return, as well, from exile⁷⁰ While Henry stayed at the court of Brittany he met with Joanna, the Duke's wife. They seemed to connect immediately and she stayed in contact after his return to England in 1399, writing him many warm letters enquiring after his good estate.⁷¹ The attraction was mutual and when Duke Jean IV died in 1399, Henry spared little time in wooing Joanna in 1401. After hasty and secretive negotiations in 1402 they were married by proxy. And thus, we may even imagine that Gower took part in some way in these negotiations and perhaps attended their wedding in Winchester Cathedral in 1403.⁷²

This exciting find vitally challenges our current view of Gower as a semi-retired theologian and occasional lawyer languishing on the southern banks of the Thames away from the excitement of London and the politics of Westminster. It definitively shows that Gower spent considerable time travelling outside of England and its date directly contests John Hurt Fisher's suggested timeframe of the poet's purported withdrawal to an apartment in the priory of St. Mary Overy in Southwark where it is believed he remained until his death in 1408. G.C. Macaulay and John Hurt Fisher place Gower in St. Mary's from 1377 where he 'devot[ed] his time mainly to his books and his friends'.⁷³ The date additionally casts doubt on whether the poet was in England at the time of the 1381 Rising despite his purported 'quasi in propria persona' first person testimony of the event in his

⁶⁹ John Froissart, *Sir John Froissart's Chronicles of England, France, and the Adjoining Countries*, trans. Thomas Johnes (Cardiganshire, Wales: Hafod Press, 1814), p.226.

⁷⁰ Alexander Gillespie, *The Causes of War: 1000CE to 1400CE* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), Vol. 2, n.p.

⁷¹ Bryan Bevan, *Henry IV* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), p.92.

⁷² Chris Given-Wilson, *Henry IV* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2016), p.235.

⁷³ Fisher, *John Gower*, p.60. Macaulay, *The Complete Works*, Vol. IV, p.xxv.

Vox Clamantis. It even creates a circumstantial link between Gower, Brittany, and the usurpation of Henry of Bolingbroke and his later marriage. This new find elevates Gower beyond Chaucer's monolithic epithet of 'moral Gower' at the end of his *Troilus and Criseyde* (V, 1856); revealing, instead, a sophisticated, worldly, and travelled man of the court with a front-row seat to Ricardian and Bretonic political negotiations at a time of great instability in medieval England and France. Critically, this further allows us to re-evaluate the importance of all of Gower's literary contributions from his French ballades and treatises, his English *pax poetica*, to the political discourse of his Latin historical chronicles.

Although Gower is not a particularly unusual name at this time in fourteenth-century England, there are very few John Gowers operating in and around London at this time.⁷⁴ There are even fewer who would fulfil such an educated, cosmopolitan role, and I find no other John Gower who could conceivably be the Gower named in this document. Gower's multilingual skill would have been of great advantage to him in the diplomatic world as Chaucer's was. Indeed, let us not forget that Chaucer was also a poet and a diplomat.⁷⁵ He went on several missions for the king, one of which, in 1378, he made Gower executor of his estate⁷⁶. I have found further archival evidence that the poet John Clanvowe was also sent on diplomatic missions⁷⁷ as was Oto de Granson.⁷⁸ It would, therefore, seem to be an aberration if Gower did not delve into the same world as his fellow poets. Thus, diplomacy and poetry in the fourteenth century appeared to share an integral link.

And that link, I would argue, is language, more specifically the ability to master and exploit the cracks and fissures of meaning and significance. As Raison points out, in the shared example from *Le Roman de la Rose*, all post-lapsarian language is integument and names and words are arbitrary, based on nothing more than local conventions, and therefore interchangeable. The world of medieval diplomacy was a realm decidedly reliant on the value and authority of the word and Lee Patterson quoting Froissart on a diplomatic mission tells of his great frustration during negotiations because the French

⁷⁴ Fisher works through all the John Gowers operating at the time in, *John Gower*, pp.37-69.

⁷⁵ Derek Pearsall, *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer: A Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2009).

⁷⁶ Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p.54.

⁷⁷ Chancery: Treaty Rolls, C76, Richard II, 1388, *National Archives*.

⁷⁸ Chancery: Treaty Rolls, C76, Richard II, 1381 *National Archives*.

had used ‘subtle and covert words with a double meaning’⁷⁹. If we recall from the quotation from Chaucer’s *House of Fame* he describes the titular house in diplomatic language writing that he observed there ‘Curroures, and eke messagers, / With boystes crammed ful of lyes’ (HoF, 2128-9); couriers and messengers with boxes brimming with lies. And diplomacy’s practitioners, which is to say messengers, envoys, and ambassadors, are described caustically by Gower himself as those ‘that usen for to lye’ (CA, II, 400).

Intercultural communication and diplomacy was fraught with complications and difficulties, difficulties that find their ultimate source in Genesis 11 and the story of the Tower of Babel. As Fyler notes ‘The Creation, human beings, and language itself all move from oneness, transparency, image, and similitude to alienation – the fallen world that St Augustine calls “the region of dissimilitude”, the land of unlikeness’ and these linguistic and geographical divisions are exacerbated and hardened after Babel.⁸⁰ St Augustine captures the utter alienation that Babel caused and writes of the multiplicity of languages and nations in *De civitate Dei*:⁸¹

And here, in the first place, man is separated from man by the difference of languages. For if two men, each ignorant of the other’s language, meet, and are not compelled to pass, but, on the contrary, to remain in company, dumb animals, though of different species, would more easily hold intercourse than they, human beings though they be. For their common nature is no help to friendliness when they are prevented by diversity of language from conveying their sentiments to one another; so that a man

⁷⁹ Lee Patterson, ‘Making Identities in Fifteenth-Century England: Henry V and John Lydgate’, in *New Historical Literary Study: Essays on Reproducing Texts, Representing History*, eds Jeffrey N. Cox and Larry J. Reynolds (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), pp.69-107, p.83.

⁸⁰ John M. Fyler, ‘Language Barriers’, *Studies in Philology* (Summer 2015), No. 3, 415-452 (p.417).

⁸¹ ‘In quo primum linguarum diversitas hominem alienat ab homine. Nam si duo sibimet invicem fiant obviam neque praeterire, sed simul esse aliqua necessitate cogantur, quorum neuter linguam novit alterius: facilius sibi muta animalia, etiam diversi generis, quam illi, cum sint homines ambo, sociantur. Quando enim quae sentiunt inter se communicare non possunt, propter solam diversitatem linguae nihil prodest ad consociandos homines tanta similitudo naturae, ita ut libentius homo sit cum cane suo quam cum homine alieno’. St Augustine, *De civitate Dei*, PL41, <<http://www.augustinus.it/latino/cdd/index2.htm>> [accessed September 29th 2017], 19.7. All Latin text comes from this edition unless otherwise stated.

would more readily hold intercourse with his dog than with a foreigner.
(19.7)⁸²

And closer to Gower's world, the fourteenth-century poet Thomas Usk complains of the mutual incomprehension between the English and the French:

And many termes there ben in Englysshe which unneth we Englysshmen
connen declare the knowlegynge: howe shulde than a Frenche man borne
such termes cone jumpere in his mater, but as the jay chatereth Englyssh?
Right so, trewly, the understanding of Englysshmen wol not stretche to
the privy termes in Frenche whatsoever we bosten of straunge langage.⁸³

The punishment for the pride of Babel, when one language suddenly became seventy-two, was discord, confusion, and chaos. These seventy-two different languages, all incompatible with each other, and the resulting confusion of tongues inevitably caused a grave crisis of communication. This mutual incomprehension led disparate nations to build up around their own languages and as Raison astutely points out, the very existence of emperors, kings, and dukes and, therefore, their interpreters and diplomatic envoys is entirely symptomatic of the post-lapsarian and post-Babel condition.

Throughout this thesis I will examine Gower's understanding of and participation in debates about the history of language. Debates that are overwhelmingly rooted, in the Middle Ages, in Augustinian philosophy and semiotic theory. Augustine's breath-taking body of work that addressed the inherent problems of language and signification after the Fall provided the framework for the Christian Middle Ages to turn the Fall into what Jager calls 'a comprehensive myth for language, literature, and verbal culture at large'.⁸⁴

⁸² St Augustine, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 2, ed. Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). All English text comes from this edition unless otherwise stated.

⁸³ Thomas Usk, *The Testament of Love*, ed. R. Allen Shoaf (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998), pp.48-49.

⁸⁴ Eric Jager, *The Tempter's Voice: Language and the Fall in Medieval Literature* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p.299.

And as John Fyler,⁸⁵ Eric Jager,⁸⁶ Eugene Vance,⁸⁷ and James Dean⁸⁸ together conclusively aver, the vernacular poets Jean de Meun, Dante, and Chaucer all respond in individual and complex ways to this linguistic crisis, each recognising with great urgency a ‘post-truth’ predicament in his own times. I want to place Gower in this literary environment, on the frontline among those exploring the limits and structures of language and poetry. My archival discovery helps to place Gower as an active participant with a central place in domestic and international politics and not as previously thought on the side-lines, a marginalisation that has in recent centuries extended to his poetic corpus as well.

⁸⁵ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*.

⁸⁶ Jager, *The Tempter’s Voice*.

⁸⁷ Eugene Vance, *Mervelous Signals: Poetics and Sign Theory in the Middle Ages* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1986).

⁸⁸ James Dean, *The World Grown Old in Later Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, MA: The Medieval Academy of America, 1997).

I: 'TOKNE OF THAT WITHINNE'

In Book VII of the *Confessio Amantis*, in a section dedicated to 'Trouthe', Gower writes that 'word is tokne of that withinne' (CA, VII, 1737). According to the *Middle English Dictionary* the noun 'token' denotes a physical object that is symbolic of something else whether conceptual or physical.⁸⁹ Gower is reporting that the verbal artefact, as a discretionary utterance, is an external, physical representation of an internal concept. In essence it is a 'sign'. The *Oxford English Dictionary* concurs, defining 'token' as primarily a symbol, an indication, a sign of a fact, event, object, or feeling.⁹⁰ It derives its etymology from the Old English *tācen* meaning 'sign, evidence, symbol' which in turn is related to the verb *tæcan* meaning to teach.⁹¹ In Book VI of the *Confessio*, in 'The Tale of Ulysses and Telegonus', Gower expressly makes this connection between 'token' and 'sign' and its capacity to signify: 'Uluxes kneu this tokne noght, / And preith to wite in som partie / What thing it myhte signefie / "A signe it is", the wyht ansuerde' (CA, VI, 1558-1561). Charles Sanders Peirce, the first American semiotician, fully recognised this semantic import of 'token', utilising the word to denote a species of sign in his theory of semiosis.⁹² Eugene Vance states 'that during more than a thousand years, the most resourceful minds of what we call the Middle Ages, speculated unceasingly often passionately about the nature and function of language' particularly 'as a privileged system of signs'. He declares that it 'is the most singular feature of the intellectual coherence of the Middle Ages, seen as a phase of Western Culture'.⁹³ Semiotics, from the Greek 'σημειον' [semeion], is the study of signs and texts, which is to say that it is the study of meaning, communication, interpretation, and, most importantly, significance. The basic unit of semiotics is the sign and the sign is, in turn, a unit of meaning. According to the structuralist Ferdinand de Saussure, one of the founders of modern semiology alongside Peirce in the early twentieth century, the sign is formed

⁸⁹ *MED* 'token' n 1 (a); 3 (a).

⁹⁰ *OED* 'token' n 1 (a).

⁹¹ *OED* 'token' n; see 'tācen' in J.R. Clark Hall, *A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1894).

⁹² Charles Santiago Sanders Peirce, *Collected papers*, eds C. Hartshorne, P. Weiss and A.W. Burks, 8 Vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1931-58), VIII, p.240. Peirce viewed semiotics and sign theory as central to his study of logic. See Charles Santiago Sanders Peirce, *Semiotics and Significs*, ed. Charles Hardwick (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1977). Peirce termed the field 'semiology' while Saussure named it 'semiotics' – I use the terms interchangeably.

⁹³ Eugene Vance, 'Mervelous Signals: Poetics, Sign Theory, and Politics in Chaucer's *Troilus*', *New Literary History*, 10 (1979), 293-337 (p.293).

from the union of the signifier (the sound image) and the signified (the concept it represents). The connection between them is arbitrary and conventional, but only through their union are significant sounds and ideas articulated.⁹⁴ Saussure believed that semiotics was the study of the role of signs as part of social and cultural life and since signs are things which stand for something else, Umberto Eco later, famously, concluded that semiotics 'is in principle the discipline studying everything which can be used in order to lie'.⁹⁵

The study of signs is considerably older than the twentieth century, as the shared quotations from Vance show, but the field evidently lay dormant until its revival in the 1910s and its later popular renaissance in the 1970s due, in large part, to Jacques Derrida's post-structuralism and deconstructive semiotic analysis.⁹⁶ Plato had long included in his works theoretical examinations on the capabilities of language to adumbrate truth in order to serve as an instrument of instruction.⁹⁷ Although he is the first to refer to words as 'signs', using it occasionally and somewhat indiscriminately throughout a number of his works, Plato does not develop a semiotic theory of language and utilises instead, on a broader scale, the language of mimesis, similarity, and reflection rather than signification.⁹⁸ As such, it must be inferred, then, that Gower's delineation of the word as 'tokne', as outward signification of an inner concept, does not adequately parallel this non-verbal Platonic model. Indeed, semiotics as a philosophical discipline begins, in earnest, with Plato's student Aristotle.⁹⁹ Aristotle rejected the Platonic philosophy of a world of ideal forms and its connection to a world of tangible realities which imperfectly mirrored it. Instead, he concerned himself primarily with metaphysics and, more specifically, the classification and categorisation of the natural world alongside

⁹⁴ Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, eds Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye in collaboration with Albert Riedlinger, trans. Wade Baskin (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1966), pp.65-70.

⁹⁵ Umberto Eco, *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979), p.7.

⁹⁶ See Jacques Derrida, "*Speech and Phenomena*" and *Other Essays on Husserl's Theory of Signs*, trans. David B. Allison (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973); *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore & London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1978); *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1981).

⁹⁷ See Plato, *Phaedrus*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues*, 4th ed., 4 Vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953); Plato, *Cratylus*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Jowett, 4th ed., 4 Vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953); Plato, *Timaeus*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues*, 4th ed., 4 Vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953).

⁹⁸ Phillip Cary, *Outward Signs: The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine's Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.21-25.

⁹⁹ Cary, *Outward Signs*, p.25.

issues of logic. His semantic scheme and theory of semiotics is, therefore, contained within the sphere of logic and in the commentaries on the final chapter of the *Prior Analytics* he defines a sign as meaning ‘a demonstrative proposition necessary or generally approved: for anything such that when it is another thing is, or when it has come into being the other has come into being before or after, is a sign of the other’s being or having come into being.’¹⁰⁰ While Aristotle’s definition of a sign does incorporate an aspect of language (propositions) in it, words themselves are never explicitly considered as ‘signs’ or ‘significations’. Aristotle’s sign belongs to a non-linguistic sphere and is utilised as a tool of deductive reasoning, as a ‘relationship of implication between two things or two facts’.¹⁰¹ It is, as Phillip Cary remarks, only ‘a theory of inference, not of communication or expression’.¹⁰² Eco elaborates further stating that ‘[Greek] signs (sēmeia) are natural givens, which today we would call symptoms or indexes, and they entertain with that which they signify, or designate, a relation based on the mechanism of inference’.¹⁰³ Greek semiotics was overwhelmingly concerned with empirical knowledge of invisible things, an epistemology of the unseen such as medical symptoms revealing a hidden disease or smoke inferring the presence of a fire. While Greek physiognomy does allow for the body to be a sign for something interior, Greek signs, as Cary avers, do not give outward expression to an inner dimension of the soul, as we see with Gower’s ‘tokne’, just involuntary outward symptoms and evidences of something else.¹⁰⁴ Thus, despite Genius’ appeals to Aristotelian authority throughout Book VII of the *Confessio*, his declaration of words as ‘tokne’ of that which is within, is, in fact, not Greek or Stoic at all.

Cicero follows Aristotle very closely thereby bringing the Stagirite’s theory of signs to the Latin-speaking and reading world. Indeed, his definition of a sign parallels Aristotle’s. He writes in *De inventione*:

¹⁰⁰ Aristotle, *Prior Analytics*, ed. and trans. A.J. Jenkinson (Belle Fourche, SD: NuVision Publications, 2004), II, 27, 70a, 7-9.

¹⁰¹ Paul Cobley, ed., *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), p.18.

¹⁰² Cary, *Outward Signs*, p.17.

¹⁰³ Umberto Eco, R. Lambertini, C. Marmo, and A. Tabarroni, ‘On Animal Language in the Medieval Classification of Signs’ in *On the Medieval Theory of Signs*, ed. Umberto Eco and C. Marmo (Philadelphia, PA: John Benjamins, 1989), pp.3-41, p.4.

¹⁰⁴ Cary, *Outward Signs*, p.37.

Signum est, quod sub sensum aliquem cadit et quiddam significat, quod ex ipso profectum videtur, quod aut ante fuerit aut in ipso negotio aut post sit consecutum et tamen indiget testimonii et gravioris confirmationis, ut cruor, fuga, pallor, pulvis, et quae his sunt similia.¹⁰⁵

[A sign is, something apprehended by one of the senses and indicating something that seems to follow logically as a result of it: the sign may have procured before the event or in immediate connexion with, or have followed after it, and yet needs further evidence and corroboration.]¹⁰⁶

Signs for Cicero are still, like Greek semiotics, concerned with evidences and indices, and his definition does little to advance semiology much further.¹⁰⁷ His semiotic innovation, unsurprisingly, comes as rhetorical strategy rather than the field of dialectics. In *De oratore* he writes that ‘animi est enim omnis actio et imago animi vultus, indices oculi: nam haec est una pars corporis, quae, quot animi motus sunt’¹⁰⁸ [All the powers of action proceed from the mind [soul], and the countenance is the image of the mind, and the eyes are its interpreters].¹⁰⁹ In this way we find that bodies can be signs of the soul, similar to Greek physiognomic theory, but Cicero, the rhetorician, is interested in the voluntary production of such bodily gestures. In the next passage he writes:

oculi sunt, quorum tum intentione, tum remissione, tum coniectu, tum hilaritate motus animorum significemus apte cum genere ipso orationis; est enim actio quasi sermo corporis, quo magis menti congruens esse debet; oculos autem natura nobis, ut equo aut leoni saetas, caudam, auris, ad motus animorum declarandos dedit (III. 222)

¹⁰⁵ Cicero, *De inventione*, <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/I.30.48>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

¹⁰⁶ Cicero, *De inventione*, ed. and trans. H.M. Hubbell (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1949).

¹⁰⁷ In fact, Cicero fully concedes that his work is somewhat unoriginal and unimaginative in *De oratore* when he asks the reader to ignore his previous *De inventione* as nothing more than unworthy schoolboy notes, Cicero, *De oratore*, trans. J.S. Watson (New York, NY: Harper & Bros., 1860), I.5.

¹⁰⁸ Cicero, *De oratore*, ed. A.S. Wilkins (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1902), III, 221.

¹⁰⁹ Cicero, *De oratore*, trans. J.S. Watson, (New York, NY: Harper & Bros., 1860), III, 221.

[It is the eyes, by whose intense or languid gaze, as well as by their quick glances and gaiety, we indicate the workings of our mind with a peculiar aptitude to the tenor of our discourse; for action is, as it were, the speech of the body, and ought therefore the more to accord with that of the soul. And Nature has given eyes to us, to declare our internal emotions, as she has bestowed a mane, tail, and ears on the horse and the lion.]

Words are not yet treated as signs and the relationship between the mind/soul and the body is not yet described in terms of inner and outer, so Gower's 'tokne' is, therefore, equally not of a Ciceronian provenance. But Cary writes that 'The crucial semiotic innovation here is rather a kind of reversal of direction, as our attention is focused on a movement from soul to body rather than (as in physiognomic inferences) from body to soul. [...] For as a rhetorician, his concern is not with inferring the motions of the soul from the body but with getting the thoughts and emotions of the soul properly and effectively expressed in the public realm where they are accessible to the senses'.¹¹⁰

The most prominent Church father on the subject was St Augustine, whose doctrine Gower was unquestionably intimately familiar with. Not only did he reside in an Augustinian Priory in St. Mary Overy in Southwark but he cites large portions of Augustinian work, often by name, in his *Mirour de l'Omme* and his *Vox Clamantis*.¹¹¹ Indeed, John M. Fyler writes that 'when we consider patristic and medieval comments on the origin of language, two things are immediately apparent. First, discussion focuses inevitably on the opening eleven chapters of Genesis, from the Creation to the Tower of Babel; second, Augustine's extensive comments on language'.¹¹² Fyler continues that 'all three of the later medieval poets [...] Jean de Meun, Dante, and Chaucer – make use of, and significantly add to the commentarial and Augustinian traditions'.¹¹³ Marcia L. Colish adds that 'Western medieval thinkers from the patristic period until roughly the beginning of the fourteenth century were greatly influenced by a certain theory of signs'¹¹⁴ - a theory of signs fundamentally verbal in nature that was formulated by St

¹¹⁰ Cary, *Outward Signs*, p.75.

¹¹¹ John Gower, *Mirour de l'Omme*, trans. William Burton Wilson, p.xxiv-xxv.

¹¹² Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.1.

¹¹³ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.2.

¹¹⁴ Marcia L. Colish, *The Mirror of Language: A Study in the Medieval Theory of Knowledge* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1968), p.vii-viii.

Augustine. Indeed, Vance states that ‘it is not an exaggeration to claim that, following St Paul, St Augustine inaugurated what we may call the semiological consciousness of the Christian West’.¹¹⁵

AUGUSTINE’S EXTERNAL SIGNS

In *De dialectica*, Augustine’s treatise on the formal discipline of logic, what he calls, the science of arguing well, he initially gives a bi-partite structured definition of a sign:

Verbum est uniuscuiusque rei signum, quod ab audiente possit intellegi, a loquente prolatum. Res est quidquid vel sentitur vel intellegitur vel latet. Signum est quod et se ipsum sensui et praeter se aliquid animo ostendit. Loqui est articulata voce signum dare¹¹⁶

[A word is the sign of some thing which can be understood by the hearer when pronounced by the speaker. A thing is whatever is felt (sensed) or understood or ‘latet’ (is hidden, inapprehensible). A sign is something which presents itself to the senses and something other than itself to the mind. To speak is to give a sign in articulate voice.]¹¹⁷

Augustine introduces us to the idea that words are ‘signs’, making concrete that link between *signa* and language that was so very absent from Plato, Aristotle, and Cicero’s semiology. Indeed, now, for the first time, we resolutely have a linguistic theory of semiotics. Augustine stresses that there is a fundamental relationship between speaker and hearer not only through a required mutual comprehension but also through a necessary act of interpretation on behalf of the hearer. Furthermore, ‘words signify things by way of their relationship to what is understood by or contained [internally] in the

¹¹⁵ Vance, *Mervelous Signals*, p.34.

¹¹⁶ St Augustine, *De dialectica*, <<http://www.augustinus.it/>> [accessed September 29th 2017], V, 9-10. All Latin text is from this edition.

¹¹⁷ St Augustine, *On Dialectics*, trans. J. Marchand, <<http://faculty.georgetown.edu/jod/texts/dialecticatrans.html>> [accessed September 29th 2017], All English text is from this edition.

mind'.¹¹⁸ Augustine's sign consists of a sensible (senses) and an intelligible (mind) aspect which in structuralist and Saussurean language designates the signifier and the signified. Again for the first time we find a declaration that the verbal utterance, that is speech, is defined as the act of giving signs. A word is an action given by the speaker and subsequently understood in the mind of the hearer as an external sign (a word, a sound, which is the signifier) of the speaker's mind (the concept, the signified). In this regard, Gower's word as 'tokne of that withinne', as external signifier of the inner signified resembles this illustration remarkably closely. It is clear that Augustine is interested in the idea of signification, meanings, and making those meanings understood.¹¹⁹ It is in this work that Augustine first introduces the term 'significare' and thus 'what it means for a word to signify something is henceforth a central topic of Augustinian semiotics'.¹²⁰

Augustine defines 'signum' twice in his mature work *De doctrina Christiana*. The first definition occurs in Book I: 'signa: res [...] quae ad significandum aliquid adhibentur'¹²¹ [Signs are things which are used to signify something]¹²² and the second elaborates on the first definition in Book II: 'Signum est enim res, praeter speciem quam ingerit sensibus, aliud aliquid ex se faciens in cogitationem venire'¹²³ [A sign is a thing which causes us to think of something beyond the impression the thing itself makes upon the senses].¹²⁴ Again, the sign is bi-partite, breaking down into a sensible (signifier) and intelligible (signified) part. Both definitions assert that a sign is a 'res' and that it relates to or denotes something else. In Book One, Augustine gives two meanings to the term 'res'. First, it refers properly to that which is not used to signify something else such as wood, stone, cattle, and so on (I.2) and, second, it refers improperly to anything whatsoever that is. Anything not a 'res' in the improper sense is nothing at all. In this latter sense 'res' may be applied to such things as words and the stone which Jacob slept on in the biblical story of Genesis 28:11, which in addition to *being* something also *signify* something (I.2). Every sign is a thing, for what is not a thing is nothing at all, but not

¹¹⁸ Cary, *Outward Signs*, p.69.

¹¹⁹ Cary, *Outward Signs*, p.69.

¹²⁰ Cary, *Outward Signs*, p.69.

¹²¹ St Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, <<http://www.augustinus.it/>> [accessed September 29th 2017], I. II. 2, 11.

¹²² St Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr (New York, NY: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958).

¹²³ St Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, <<http://www.augustinus.it/>> [accessed September 29th 2017], II. I. 1, 5-7.

¹²⁴ St Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, trans. D.W. Robertson, Jr. (New York, NY: Bobbs-Merrill, 1958).

every thing is a sign (I, 2). Thus, *res*, according to Augustine, denotes the object of knowledge or the existing realities (for what is not a thing is nothing) which are referred to by such signs as words which are, as we determined earlier, names and it is this relationship between *signum* and *res* that becomes important. The *res* is the object, the referent reality that the *signum* (natural, verbal, visual, aural, or other sensory data) signifies.

Augustine describes two types of signs, natural (*naturalia*) and given (*data*). Of natural signs he writes:

Naturalia sunt quae sine voluntate atque ullo appetitu significandi praeter se aliquid aliud ex se cognosci faciunt, sicuti est fumus significans ignem. Non enim volens significare id facit, sed rerum expertarum animadversione et notatione cognoscitur ignem subesse, etiam si fumus solus appareat. Sed et vestigium transeuntis animantis ad hoc genus pertinet; et vultus irati seu tristis affectionem animi significat, etiam nulla eius voluntate qui aut iratus aut tristis est; aut si quis alius motus animi vultu indice proditur, etiam nobis non id agentibus ut prodatur.

[Natural signs are those which, apart from any intention or desire of using them as signs, do yet lead to the knowledge of something else, as, for example, smoke when it indicates fire. For it is not from any intention of making it a sign that it is so, but through attention to experience we come to know that fire is beneath, even when nothing but smoke can be seen. And the footprint of an animal passing by belongs to this class of signs. And the countenance of an angry or sorrowful man indicates the feeling in his mind, independently of his will: and in the same way every other emotion of the mind is betrayed by the tell-tale countenance, even though we do nothing with the intention of making it known.] (1.2)

And of given (*data*) signs he writes:

Data vero signa sunt quae sibi quaeque viventia invicem dant ad demonstrandos quantum possunt motus animi sui, vel sensa aut intellecta quaelibet. Nec ulla causa est nobis significandi, id est signi dandi, nisi ad depromendum et traiciendum in alterius animum id quod animo gerit is qui signum dat.

[Given signs, on the other hand, are those which living beings mutually exchange for the purpose of showing, as well as they can, the feelings of their minds, or their perceptions, or their thoughts. Nor is there any reason for giving a sign except the desire of drawing forth and conveying into another's mind what the giver of the sign has in his own mind.]¹²⁵ (2.3)

Important for the understanding of Augustinian theory is this crucial and uniquely innovative division of signs into 'involuntary' (*naturalia*) and 'voluntary' (*data*). Thus, Augustine states in *De doctrina Christiana* that signs, both *naturalia* and *data*, have an epistemic function with the latter, unlike the former, being through a human agent and are products of the will. *Signa naturalia* correspond most directly to the Greek semiotics of inference but *signa data*, which interest Augustine the most and are unheard of in Greek semiology, are first and foremost for intentional human communication. As Phillip Cary remarks 'the image [presented of *signa data*] is of something being taken down and brought out from a storage place and then carried across an intervening space and put in a new place, the suggestion being that meaning is conveyed from one soul into another through the opaque medium of corporeal signs'.¹²⁶ All *signa data* (which words are part of) for Augustine function to give a bodily, external expression to the interior, the soul/mind. Thus, as we can see, Gower's word as 'tokne of that which is withinne' is

¹²⁵ I have replaced 'conventional signs' with 'given signs' following Cary who believes it a gross mistranslation that 'obscures the rationale for his classification, which turns on the difference between the inferential semeiosis of the Greek tradition and the voluntary giving of signs implied by the Latin *significatio*' and erroneously confuses issues 'in the theory of language with issues about the significance of signs, they [the translators] seem to have assumed that the term *signa data* could only be Augustine's odd way of indicating that words have their significance by convention rather than by nature'. *Outward Signs*, p.77.

¹²⁶ Cary, *Outward Signs*, pp.76-77.

unmistakeably Augustinian. Additionally, similarly to Gower, we see emerge Augustine's binary opposition of outer and inner and the sign as a vehicle between the two realms. The great deceptiveness, however, and inadequacy of human speech stems from this difference, which is nothing less than the ontological gulf fixed between body and soul.¹²⁷

THE FALLEN AND CORPOREAL SIGN

Jacques Derrida remarked in his influential *Of Grammatology* that 'The sign is always a sign of the Fall. Absence always relates to distancing from God'.¹²⁸ Indeed, the *Book of Genesis* is a persistent subject throughout all of Augustine's works and one that fully permeates his philosophy of language and Eric Jager finds that his 'scriptural hermeneutics rests on a theory of signs in which the Fall occupies a crucial place'.¹²⁹ He undertakes an explication of the beginning of the Book of Genesis at least five times, in the *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, *De Genesi ad Litteram imperfectus liber*, the end of his *Confessiones*, *De Genesi ad litteram*, and *De civitate Dei*. Certainly a consistent theme of *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* is the dichotomy between the spiritual and the carnal, beginning with the creation of the heaven and the earth, the invisible and visible world. Augustine applies this binary of spiritual and carnal to scriptural interpretation stating that carnal interpretation of a text would seem to the text 'just as the letter sounds' highlighting a further opposition between the external and the internal in understanding signs as well as the evolution of signs themselves. Augustine links the corporeal world to the external sounds of words and in turn to corrupted carnality and post-lapsarian sexuality. He writes:

Quod autem scriptum est: Masculum et feminam fecit illos; et benedixit eos Deus dicens, Crescite et multiplicamini, et generate, et replete terram; rectissime quaeritur quemadmodum accipienda sit coniunctio masculi et feminae ante peccatum, et ista benedictio qua dictum est: Crescite et

¹²⁷ Cary, *Outward Signs*, p.77.

¹²⁸ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), p.283.

¹²⁹ Jager, *The Tempter's Voice*, p.52.

multiplicamini, et generate, et replete terram: utrum carnaliter, an spiritualiter accipienda sit.

[There follows the words, “He made them male and female, and God blessed them saying, ‘Increase and multiply and generate and fill the earth.’” Here one is completely right to ask in what sense we should understand the union of male and female before sin, as well as the blessing that said “Increase and multiply, and generate and fill the earth”. Should we understand it carnally or spiritually?] (1.19.30)

He responds:

Licet enim nobis eam etiam spiritualiter accipere, ut in carnalem fecunditatem post peccatum conversa esse credatur. Erat enim prius casta coniunctio masculi et feminae; huius ad regendum, illius ad obtemperandum accommodata: et spiritalis fetus intellegibilium et immortalium gaudiorum replens terram, id est, vivificans corpus, et dominans eius;

[For we are permitted to understand it spiritually and to believe that it was changed into carnal fecundity after sin. For there was first the chaste union of male and female, of the former to rule, of the latter to obey, and there was the spiritual offspring of intelligible and immortal joys filling the earth, that is, giving life to the body and ruling it.] (1.19.30)

If we recall, Augustine’s definitions of the *signum* in *De dialectica* and *De doctrina Christiana* stress that the sign is a *res*, a thing, therefore, he places it strictly in the material world and it is initially only apprehended through the corporeal senses. Augustine tells

us in *De trinitate* that words are ‘corporaliter sonant’ [corporeal sonorities]¹³⁰ but the most notable coalescence of these ideas of body and sign, and the subsequent opposition between spiritual and carnal, internal and external, comes in this early commentary on the Book of Genesis. Here, Augustine intertwines the very origin of the body with the genesis of language itself. The two become fundamentally interconnected. He writes:

Nam illa mors, quam omnes qui ex Adam nati sumus, coepimus debere naturae, quam minatus est Deus, cum praeceptum daret ne arboris fructus ille ederetur; illa ergo mors in tunicis pelliceis figurata est. Ipsi enim sibi fecerunt praecinctoria de foliis fici, et Deus illis fecit tunicas pelliceas: id est, ipsi appetiverunt mentiendi libidinem relicta facie veritatis, et Deus corpora eorum in istam mortalitatem carnis mutavit, ubi latent corda mendacia. Neque enim in illis corporibus coelestibus sic latere posse cogitationes credendum est, quemadmodum in his corporibus latent: sed sicut nonnulli motus animorum apparent in vultu, et maxime in oculis, sic in illa perspicuitate ac simplicitate coelestium corporum omnes omnino motus animi latere non arbitror. Itaque illi merebuntur habitationem illam et commutationem in angelicam formam, qui etiam in hac vita cum possint sub tunicis pelliceis occultare mendacia, oderunt tamen ea et cavent flagrantissimo amore veritatis, et hoc solum tegunt, quod ii qui audiunt, ferre non possunt; sed nulla mentiuntur.¹³¹

[For all of us who are born from Adam have begun to owe to nature that death with which God threatened us when he gave the command not to eat the fruit of that tree; that death was prefigured by the garments of skin. For they made for themselves aprons from the leaves of the fig tree, but God made for them garments of skin. That is, having abandoned the face of truth, they sought the pleasure of lying, and God changed their bodies

¹³⁰ St Augustine, *De trinitate*, IV. 21.30, <<http://www.augustinus.ie>> [accessed September 29th 2017]. All Latin text comes from this edition.

¹³¹ St Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, <http://www.augustinus.it/latino/genesi_dcm/index2.htm> [accessed September 29th 2017], Book II, 21.32. All Latin text comes from this edition.

into this mortal flesh in which deceitful hearts are hidden. For we should not believe that thoughts could be hidden in those heavenly bodies, as they lie hidden in these bodies. Rather as some states of soul are apparent on the countenance, and especially in the eyes, so I think that in the clarity and simplicity of those heavenly bodies absolutely no states of the soul are hidden. Men will merit that dwelling and transformation into angelic form if even in this life, when they could hide lies under the garments of skin, they hate and avoid them out of a burning love of the truth, hiding only what their hearers cannot bear, but not telling any lies.]¹³²

Adam and Eve did not originally possess bodies of ‘mortal flesh’ but instead had translucent or what he terms ‘heavenly bodies’. This transparent body allowed thoughts to be known and understood directly by others. The inner and outer, the signified and signifier, mind and body, could essentially see each other and be seen to others thus allowing for perfect pellucidity of correspondence of thought and word (signifier and signified). Theoretically, this would make lying impossible and Augustine tells us this exactly in *De Libero Arbitrio*¹³³ when he denies the existence of mendacity in Eden. Therefore, the signifier and signified perfectly related to each other in the pre-lapsarian world. The relationship between *res* and *signum*, between realities and their names, was also, as Genesis 2:19 tells us, of a perfect nature. In Paradise when Adam named things the names of things corresponded perfectly to their essence: ‘Omne enim quod vocavit Adam animae viventis ipsum est nomen eius’ [for whatsoever Adam called any living creature the same is its name]. The original human language was composed of sounds given by God, which were consubstantial with the things they signified.¹³⁴ The first transgression was punished with corporeality, thus corruptibility and physical decay (death) which all together connotes to the notion of temporality. Augustine posits an extra-verbal language present in Eden, likening such a thing to the communication of the soul through the play of light in the eyes. Indeed, Augustine tells us earlier in *De Genesi*

¹³² St Augustine, *On Genesis Against the Manichees*, trans. Roland J. Teske, (Washington, D.C: The Catholic University of America Press, 1991, rpr. 2001). All English text comes from this edition.

¹³³ St Augustine, *De Libero Arbitrio*, 3.20, <<http://www.augustinus.ie>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

¹³⁴ E. Michael Gerli, ‘The Greeks, the Romans, and the Ambiguity of Signs: De doctrina Christiana, the Fall, and the Hermeneutics of the Libro de buen amor’, *Bulletin of Spanish Studies*, 79:4, 411-428 (p.418).

contra Manichaeos that the first humans did not use external words in Paradise but had an internal source of knowledge unlike the post-lapsarian world.

Post peccatum autem homo laborare coepit in terra, et necessarias habere illas nubes. Ante peccatum vero, cum viride agri et pabulum fecisset Deus, quo nomine invisibilem creaturam significari diximus, irrigabat eam fonte interiore, loquens in intellectum eius: ut non extrinsecus verba exciperet, tamquam ex supradictis nubibus pluviam; sed fonte suo, hoc est de intimis suis manante veritate, satiaretur

[After sin man began to labour on the earth and to have need of those clouds. But before sin God had made the green of the field and food, and we said that this expression signified the invisible creature. God watered it by an interior spring, speaking to its intellect, so that it did not receive words from the outside, as rain from the aforementioned clouds. Rather it was satisfied from its own spring, that is, by the truth flowing from its interior.] (2.4.5 DGM)

Augustine repeatedly refers to this inner discourse as ‘*facies veritatis*’ [the face of truth]¹³⁵, ‘*lux illa interior veritatis*’ [the interior light of truth]¹³⁶ and the ‘*conspectus Dei*’ [sight of God].¹³⁷ Eric Jager tells us that these transparent bodies had ‘a direct, unmediated knowledge from God just as the Angels did’¹³⁸ that could offer us true knowledge of realities/*res* but ‘with the Fall and the exile from Paradise, however, Adam and his descendants lost this vision [of God and truth] and were banished into an alien realm where they had to seek knowledge indirectly through material signs apprehended by the bodily senses, signs being either things themselves, or images, or words’.¹³⁹ Therefore, the body and the verbal sign are both born from the same sin, both part of the

¹³⁵ St Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, II, 21.32.

¹³⁶ St Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, II, 16.24.

¹³⁷ St Augustine, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, II, 16.24.

¹³⁸ Jager, *The Tempter's Voice*, p.53.

¹³⁹ Jager, *The Tempter's Voice*, p.52.

physical and material world, both in opposition to interiority.¹⁴⁰ Cary tells us that Augustine invented the way we now think about outer and inner and the concept of external signs expressing what lies hidden within the inner self, which he calls Augustine's expressionist semiotics. The crux of his thesis is that in Augustine's framework of causality there exist three levels: God, souls, and bodies. In this three-tiered hierarchy of being to be higher is also to be more inward. The inner life of the soul is superior to mere external things at the bottom of the hierarchy, while God at the top of the hierarchy is not only above the soul but within it. Furthermore, souls can be moved inwardly by God, who is immutable and impassible, by his grace and beauty and love, but not by external things, which literally have no power to move souls, no causal efficacy over them. For bodies are at the very bottom of the hierarchy of being, where they can be moved by higher things but not move them'.¹⁴¹ This is how, for Augustine, external sensible signs, which have no power to adequately express intelligible things, are ineffective at expressing what lies within. It is for this reason that Augustine dismisses astrological determinism as powerless to move souls. In *De doctrina Christiana* he calls it a superstition that is 'magnus error et magna dementia' [a great error and great madness]¹⁴² which are 'opinionones quibusdam rerum signis humana praesumptione institutis' [notions which have their origin in certain signs of things being arbitrarily fixed upon by the presumption of men].¹⁴³

We can see that Gower, too, shares this Augustinian ontological hierarchy of soul and body. In the Prologue, he writes of the 'werre' between the two realms that 'ferst began in Paradis' (CA, Prologue, 1000; 1005) and how this division has further caused separate phenomenological states based on their contrary desires: 'That what thing that the body hateth / The soule loveth and debateth' (CA, Prologue, 997-998). He writes in Book VII of the superiority of the soul as that 'lich to God it hath a forme, / Thurgh which figure and which liknesse / hath many any hyh noblesse / Appropred to his oghne kind' (CA, VII, 496-499). Indeed, for Gower as for Augustine, the soul's domain is 'upward to the hevene' (CA, VII, 505) and 'He the soule al only made / Himselven for to serve and

¹⁴⁰ Jager points out that Augustine refines this point in his later and last sustained treatise on Genesis *De Genesi ad litteram*. Here he maintains that Adam and Eve did use external words pre-Fall and deduces from *De civitate Dei* that the language they spoke was in fact Hebrew, though he continues to prioritise an internal light. *The Tempter's Voice*, pp.54-55.

¹⁴¹ Cary, *Outward Signs*, pp. vii-8.

¹⁴² St Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, II, 22.33.

¹⁴³ St Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, II, 22.34.

glade' (CA, VII, 513-514). The body on the other hand, operates in a different ontological sphere and 'desireth toward helle', with Gower adding the important qualification that 'Al erthli thing which God began / Was only mad to serve man' (CA, VII, 511-512). This acknowledgement of the inferiority of the body to the soul comes just over a hundred lines before Gower's section on 'Astronomy'. Here, Gower, just as Augustine does, argues for the powerlessness of external signs to cause changes in the soul through his own dismissal of anxieties about astrological fate, a key contention that he upholds throughout all three of his major works.¹⁴⁴

In Book VII of the *Confessio Amantis* he writes 'That if men weren goode and wise / And plesant unto the Godhede, / Thei scholden nocht the sterres drede' (CA, VII, 652-54). In the Latin heading to the astronomical section Gower writes in a comparable manner that the planets and their star signs belong to a world of bodies, therefore a lower ontology and because of this it is the wise man that will rule the stars and not the other way around 'Lege planetarum magis inferior reguntur, / Ista set interdum regula fallit opus. / Vir medieante deo sapiens dominabitur astris, / Fata nec immerito quid nouitatis agunt (CA, VII, iv) [Things lower down are ruled by the law of the planets, and sometimes that governance foils endeavour. With God's intervention the wise man will rule the stars, and the fates will not cause anything suddenly unfavourably]. We find in his *Vox Clamantis* an almost identical couplet 'In virtute dei sapiens dominabitur astra, /

¹⁴⁴ In this same way Dante follows the Augustinian idea that external things cannot control the soul in Canto XVI of *Purgatorio*:

Lo cielo i vostri movimenti inizia;
 non dico tutti, ma posto ch' i' 'l dica,
 lume v'è dato a bene e a malizia,
 e libero voler; che, se fatica
 nelle prime battaglie col ciel dura,
 poi vince tutto, se ben si notrica.
 A maggior forza ed a miglior natura
 liberi soggiacete; e quella cria
 lamente in voi, che 'l ciel non ha in sua cura.

Però, se 'l mondo presente disvia,
 in voi è la cagione, in voi si cheggia;
 e io te ne sarò or vera spia. (*Purgatorio*, Canto XVI, 64-84)

[The heavens initiate your impulses; I do not say all, but, if I did, light is given on good and evil, and free will, and if it bear the strain in the first battlings with the heavens, then, being rightly nurtured, it conquers all. To a greater power and to a better nature you, free, are subject, and that creates the mind in you which the heavens have not in their charge. Therefore if the present world goes astray, in you is the cause, in you let it be sought; and in this I will be to thee now a faithful scout.]

Dante Alighieri, *Purgatorio*, trans. John D. Sinclair (Oxford; Oxford University Press, 1939-46, repr.1961).

Totaque consequitur vis orizontis eum (VC, v, 239-40)¹⁴⁵ [The man who is knowing in the virtue of God will dominate the stars, and all the power of heaven attends him].¹⁴⁶ In his Anglo-Norman *Mirour de l'Omme* Gower is unequivocal about the lack of planetary influence in a section that discusses the causes of all discord, disharmony and division in the world. He writes:

Quoy de Saturne et de Commete?
Sont il qui font nostre inquiete,
Sicomme les clerks vont disputant,
Et dient deinz lour cercle et mete
Que l'un et l'autre est trop replete
De la malice? Et nepourqant
Un soul prodhomme a dieu priant
Porra quasser du meintenant
Trestout le pis de leur diete:
Dont m'est avis a mon semblant,
Depuisque l'omme est si puissant
Nous n'avons garde du planete. (MO, 26737-49)

[What about Saturn and the comet? Are they what cause our troubles as clerks argue? Within their circles, both (they say) are full of malice. And yet a single worthy man, praying to God, can instantly shatter all the worst of their influence. So it seems to me, since man is so powerful, that we should pay no attention to planets]

¹⁴⁵ G.C. Macaulay, ed., *The Complete Works of John Gower*, Vol. IV (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902). All Latin *Vox* quotations are taken from this edition.

¹⁴⁶ John Gower, *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, trans. and ed. by Eric W. Stockton (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1962). All English *Vox* text comes from this edition.

Cary writes that ‘bodies have no positive power to give minds a vision of the truth, but they can hinder mental vision in a way somehow analogous to bodily opacity blocking the vision of our corporeal eyes’.¹⁴⁷ In the pre-lapsarian paradise true knowledge came from God internally, passed on through an ‘inner word’ to the soul and thus expressed through the body (never the other way around). However, with the fall the opacity of the fleshly body obstructed the divinely inspired internal word, this inner light of truth, from being known and understood and without this direct access to truthful knowledge of things the relationship between signifier and signified becomes arbitrary and meaning is therefore lost. As Vance writes ‘Things themselves cannot be known directly by the mind, and, knowledge of things must pass through signs’¹⁴⁸ but Augustine’s Adam and Eve have been plunged solely into a world of bodies (where signs belong), a world which has no causal effect on the soul, much less the effect of giving it knowledge of intelligible truths above it. Thus, for Augustine, the theory of the sign *is* the theory of the body.

Furthermore, because of the loss of the transparent inner thought in the heavenly bodies and the alienation of the signifier and the signified with the separation of body to the soul, Fallen language, thus became arbitrary and conventional with ‘truths’ only being forged through community agreement as Augustine writes in *De doctrina Christiana*:

sicut ergo hae omnes significationes pro suae cuiusque societatis consensione animos movent, et quia diversa consensio est, diverse movent; nec ideo consenserunt in eas homines, quia iam valebant ad significationem, sed ideo valent quia consenserunt in eas;

[Now, just as all these signs affect the mind according to the arrangements of the community in which each man lives, and affect different men's minds differently, because these arrangements are different; and as, further, men did not agree upon them as signs because they were already

¹⁴⁷ Cary, *Outward Signs*, p.82.

¹⁴⁸ Vance, *Mervelous Signals*, p.36.

significant, but on the contrary they are now significant because men have agreed upon them] (DDC 24.7)

The inability for universal consensus of meaning of signs was ultimately caused by the Fall and the first sin but also exacerbated by the building of the Tower of Babel and the subsequent dispersal of language with its complete confusion of communication. A common designation for Genesis 11 during the Middle Ages was ‘Confusio linguarum et dispersion populourm’ [confusion of tongues and dispersion of peoples], implicating the story of Babel in the estrangement from grace, the dispersion of humanity, and the larger figure of divine banishment and retribution for the sins of Eden’.¹⁴⁹ Augustine writes:

Sed quia verberato aere statim transeunt nec diutius manent quam sonant, instituta sunt per litteras signa verborum. Ita voces oculis ostenduntur, non per seipsas, sed per signa quaedam sua. Ista signa igitur non potuerunt communia esse omnibus Gentibus, peccato quodam dissensionis humanae, cum ad se quisque principatum rapit. Cuius superbiae signum est erecta illa turris in caelum, ubi homines impii non solum animos, sed etiam voces dissonas habere meruerunt (4.5)

[But because words pass away as soon as they strike upon the air, and last no longer than their sound, men have by means of letters formed signs of words. Thus the sounds of the voice are made visible to the eye, not of course as sounds, but by means of certain signs. It has been found impossible, however, to make those signs common to all nations owing to the sin of discord among men, which springs from every man trying to snatch the chief place for himself. And that celebrated tower which was built to reach to heaven was an indication of this arrogance of spirit; and the ungodly men concerned in it justly earned the punishment of having

¹⁴⁹ E. Michael Gerli, ‘The Greeks, the Romans, and the Ambiguity of Signs’, pp.418-419.

not their minds only, but their tongues besides, thrown into confusion and discordance.]

Augustine addresses the ambiguity implicit in all communication including the written word and sign:

una figura litterae X, quae decussatim notatur, aliud apud Graecos, aliud apud Latinos valet, non natura, sed placito et consensione significandi; et ideo qui utramque linguam novit, si homini Graeco velit aliquid significare scribendo, non in ea significatione ponit hanc litteram in qua eam ponit cum homini scribit Latino, et Beta uno eodemque sono apud Graecos litterae, apud Latinos oleris nomen est, et cum dico: Lege, in his duabus syllabis aliud Graecus, aliud Latinus intellegit; sicut ergo hae omnes significationes pro suae cuiusque societatis consensione animos movent, et quia diversa consensio est, diverse movent; nec ideo consenserunt in eas homines, quia iam valebant ad significationem, sed ideo valent quia consenserunt in eas (DDC, II, 24.37)

[the same figure of the letter X, which is made in the shape of a cross, means one thing among the Greeks and another among the Latins, not by nature, but by agreement and pre-arrangement as to its signification; and so, any one who knows both languages uses this letter in a different sense when writing to a Greek from that in which he uses it when writing to a Latin. And the same sound, *beta*, which is the name of a letter among the Greeks, is the name of a vegetable among the Latins; and when I say, *lege*, these two syllables mean one thing to a Greek and another to a Latin. Now, just as all these signs affect the mind according to the arrangements of the community in which each man lives, and affect different men's minds differently, because these arrangements are different; and as, further, men did not agree upon them as signs because they were already significant,

but on the contrary they are now significant because men have agreed upon them]

To sum up then, according to Augustine, language is part of a complex semiotic system. Words are intentional/given signs, and these signs are firstly received through the senses and then cognitively interpreted through the intellect (beyond the senses) therefore involving both body and mind, the signifier and the signified. Thus, it is clear that signs require interpretation both sensory and intellectual. However, due to the first sin of Pride, human will became infected resulting in the fleshly, mortal and opaque body which blocked the access to interior dialogue and true knowledge of God. This introduction of the body established a new realm separate to that of the soul therefore initiating a separation between the two - body and soul. The sign, which relied on the union between body and soul also became corrupted. In particular, the relationship between things (*res*) and signs (*signa*) has broken down. That means that signs no longer directly indicate or signify realities as they did in Eden. Because signs cannot signify realities accurately, it becomes impossible to teach effectively using signs and, as Augustine avers, all teaching requires signs. Therefore, nothing is taught through signs. Cary tells us that Augustine's 'expressionist semiotics includes the twin theses that words are external signs and that they get their significance by expressing things that belong to the deeper ontological level of the soul or inner self'.¹⁵⁰ Augustine's three-tiered Platonist hierarchy descends from divine truth to human understanding to external words and never the other way around.

INSTRUCTIVE SIGNS

In his *Retractiones* (I, x, ii), Augustine notes that *De magistro* was written at the same time as *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (388-89 A.D.). T. Brian Mooney writes that 'the significance of Augustine's abiding concerns with *Genesis* together with the fact that the *De magistro* was written around the same time as *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* provide cause for speculating that the *De magistro* exemplifies themes that are deeply connected

¹⁵⁰ Cary, *Outward Signs*, p.17.

to his understanding of God's creative agency in *Genesis*'.¹⁵¹ In *De doctrina Christiana*, Augustine updates Cicero's triple aim of the orator 'ut probet, ut delectet, ut flectat' [to prove, to please, to persuade] by declaring that the eloquent man should instead strive to 'ut doceat, ut delectet, ut flectat' [to instruct, to please, to move] (IV. 12.27). By replacing Cicero's 'to prove' with 'to instruct', Augustine places education and instruction as the prime purpose of the orator and Christian preacher which should, in turn, influence their use and style of language. He substitutes the Ciceronian court room with the Augustinian classroom. 'To instruct' is a necessity and 'pleasing' and 'moving' are, therefore, subordinate to 'instructing' at all times and the pursuit of holiness must be the number one aim. The *telos* of all instruction, for Augustine, is God. 'About those who try only to please so that they neither teach nor move, he says that their eloquence is the more damnable the finer eloquence it is'.¹⁵² Augustine takes this rhetorical term 'delectatio' from late antiquity but, as Carol Harrison remarks, 'this delight "occasioned by Scripture or the preacher" is a sacred, redemptive delight'¹⁵³ and "What ultimately matters is not the aesthetic form, the words themselves, or the style used but their content, their meaning, their intention or inspiration, and this can only be found in God himself".¹⁵⁴ This emphasis on language in the service of education is not at all surprising, though often overlooked, as Augustine, former academic instructor and subsequent Christian preacher and bishop, develops his discussion of language most fully in works concentrated on the role it plays in doctrine whose Latin form *doctrina* carries the dual meaning of teaching, instruction or education and that of the written/spoken knowledge imparted by teaching itself.¹⁵⁵ Indeed, ideas on pedagogy/andragogy and correct instruction occur not only in *De magistro*, but in *De catechizandis rudibus*, and of course the aforementioned *De doctrina Christiana*.

¹⁵¹ T. Brian Mooney and Mark Nowacki eds, *Understanding Teaching and Learning: Classic Texts on Education by Augustine, Aquinas, Newman and Mill* (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2011), p.50. All English text comes from this edition unless otherwise stated.

¹⁵² James J. Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages: A History of Rhetorical Theory from St Augustine to the Renaissance* (Berkeley, CA.: University of California Press, 1974), p.347.

¹⁵³ H.J. Westra, 'Augustine and Poetic Exegesis', *Poetry and Exegesis in Premodern Latin Christianity: The Encounter Between Classical and Christian Strategies of Interpretation*, eds Willemien Otten and Karla Pollmann (Leiden: Brill, 2007), pp. 9-28, p.20.

¹⁵⁴ Caroline Harrison, *Augustine: Christian truth and Fractured Humanity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p.226.

¹⁵⁵ 'doctrina', *A Smaller Latin-English Dictionary*, Sir William Smith, J.F. Lockwood, 3rd rev. edition (London: John Murray, 1933).

De magistro, the earliest of these works (c.390 A.D.), takes on the familiar form of the Socratic dialogue favoured by Plato and is between Augustine and his son Adeodatus. It focuses on his semiotic philosophy of language as well as the nature of teaching, his approach to epistemology and acquisition of knowledge. In this work, Augustine notably declares that ‘verba signa esse’ [words are signs] (I.3) a concept already, as we have seen, laid out in his *De dialectica*. In *De magistro* Augustine goes on to say that ‘omnia verba nomina dicere’ [all words are names] (V.13-15) thus logically we can infer from this that names are signs. He establishes a relationship between words or signs and instruction when he writes that ‘nam loquendo nos docere velle manifestum est’ [it is clear that when we speak we teach] (I.1) and that ‘nihil nos locutione, nisi ut doceamus appetere’ [when we speak we want nothing other than to teach] (I.1). Gower’s ‘tokne’ with its Old English relationship to the verb to teach, thus, also innately and remarkably reflects this Augustinian understanding of the sign and its primary function. This sentiment is reinforced when Augustine writes ‘et duas iam loquendi causas constituo, aut ut doceamus, aut ut commemoremus vel alios vel nosmetipsos’ [And I assert two reasons for speaking: either in order to teach, or in order to remind others or ourselves] (I.1). This culminates in the statement that ‘nihil sine signis doceri’ [nothing can be taught without using signs] (10.31). Thus Augustine highlights the inextricable relationship between *doctrina*, meaning both learning and instruction, and signs but also importantly how instruction is wholly reliant on signs. This relationship between learning and signs is continued in his *De doctrina Christiana* when he writes that ‘Omnis doctrina vel rerum est vel signorum, sed res per signa discuntur’¹⁵⁶ [All instruction is either about things or about signs; but things are learned by means of signs].¹⁵⁷ So, therefore, not only is teaching reliant on signs as he states here and in *De magistro* but signs also make up the bulk of the knowledge imparted. Signs are the medium of teaching and signs are the medium of learning.

Because of this overwhelming reliance of teaching and knowledge acquisition on signs, Augustine is naturally concerned with, indeed anxious about, the ability of these signs to reflect truth and reality and he begins to question the fidelity of the relationship between *res* and *signum*, reality and the sign. He is ultimately suspicious of the sign’s

¹⁵⁶ St Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, <<http://www.augustinus.it/>> [accessed September 29th 2017], I, II, 2, 1-2.

¹⁵⁷ St Augustine, *De doctrina Christiana*, trans. James Shaw, ed. Philip Schaff, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 2. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887).

ability to reveal adequately the inner thought for the purpose of communication. Augustine expresses this major concern facing the teacher in *De catechizandis rudibus*:

vel illa causa quam dixi, quia magis nos delectat et tenet quod in silentio mente cernimus, nec inde volumus avocari ad verborum longe disparem strepitum; vel quia etiam cum sermo iucundus est, magis nos libet audire aut legere quae melius dicta sunt et quae sine nostra cura et sollicitudine promuntur, quam ad alienum sensum repentina verba coaptare incerto exitu, sive utrum occurrant pro sententia, sive utrum accipiantur utiliter¹⁵⁸

[And that may spring either from the cause of which I have already spoken, namely, the fact that our intelligence is better pleased and more thoroughly arrested by that which we perceive in silence in the mind, and that we have no inclination to have our attention called off from it to a noise of words coming far short of representing it; or from the circumstance that even when discourse is pleasant, we have more delight in hearing or reading things which have been expressed in a superior manner, and which are set forth without any care or anxiety on our part, than in putting together, with a view to the comprehension of others, words suddenly conceived, and leaving it an uncertain issue, on the one hand, whether such terms occur to us as adequately represent the sense, and on the other, whether they be accepted in such a manner as to profit]¹⁵⁹
(10.14)

Augustine expresses anxiety about the ability of signs to communicate realities or to convey adequately their sense in order to communicate properly. He acknowledges a split between the meaning and the word or sign itself, its exterior sound or ‘noise of words’

¹⁵⁸ Latin text from PL40, <http://www.augustinus.it/latino/catechesi_cristiana/index.htm> [accessed September 29th 2017].

¹⁵⁹ S.D.F. Salmond, trans., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887).

and the interior thought or meaning. He is suggesting a break in the correlation between inner and outer meaning.

Nam et mihi prope semper sermo meus displicet. Melioris enim avidus sum, quo saepe fruor interius, antequam eum explicare verbis sonantibus coepero: quod ubi minus quam mihi motus est evaluero, contristor linguam meam cordi meo non potuisse sufficere. Totum enim quod intelligo, volo ut qui me audit intelligat; et sentio me non ita loqui, ut hoc efficiam: maxime quia ille intellectus quasi rapida coruscatione perfundit animum, illa autem locutio tarda et longa est, longeque dissimilis, et dum ista volvitur, iam se ille in secreta sua condidit

[Indeed with me, too, it is almost always the fact that my speech displeases myself. For I am covetous of something better, the possession of which I frequently enjoy within me before I commence to body it forth in intelligible words: and then when my capacities of expression prove inferior to my inner apprehensions, I grieve over the inability which my tongue has betrayed in answering to my heart. For it is my wish that he who hears me should have the same complete understanding of the subject which I have myself; and I perceive that I fail to speak in a manner calculated to effect that, and that this arises mainly from the circumstance that the intellectual apprehension diffuses itself through the mind with something like a rapid flash, whereas the utterance is slow, and occupies time, and is of a vastly different nature, so that, while this latter is moving on, the intellectual apprehension has already withdrawn itself within its secret abodes.] (2.3)

Acknowledging the temporality and corporeal nature of the sign, Augustine again expresses his frustrations at the inadequacy of signs to express fully the inner depths. They appear to always be at two removes from what they signify.

In the first part of *De magistro* in which we find that all words are signs and all teaching involves signs, Augustine expresses a suspicion of information received through the senses and further argues that signs including verbal, visual, corporeal gestures and indications are all open to multiple senses and misinterpretations and therefore lead only to confusion. This matter is further complicated by the ‘existence of *signs of signs*, as is the case when a word is written. The written word is a sign of a sign. The words, ‘Romulus’, ‘Rome’, ‘virtue’, and ‘river’ are all nouns but the words used, either in speech or when written, are not the realities by means of these signs’.¹⁶⁰ Because of the ambiguity of the sign and its ineffectiveness at insuring correct interpretation Augustine avers that nothing can be taught using signs. This paradox becomes the central tenet of this work.

Quod si diligentius consideremus, fortasse nihil invenies, quod per sua signa discatur. Cum enim mihi signum datur, si nescientem me invenit cuius rei signum sit, docere me nihil potest: si vero scientem, quid disco per signum?

[When we consider this more carefully, then maybe we will find that nothing can really be learnt by means of signs. When someone presents a sign to me, if I do not know what reality it is a sign of, it can teach me nothing. And if I already know the reality, what then does the sign teach me?] (10.33)

Without prior knowledge of the reality a sign signifies, a sign cannot be interpreted correctly. Signs do not inform us about realities but quite the opposite, the knowledge of reality informs us about signs.

Hactenus verba valuerunt, quibus ut plurimum tribuam, admonent tantum ut quaeramus res, non exhibent ut noverimus. Is me autem aliquid docet, qui vel oculis, vel ulli corporis sensui, vel ipsi etiam menti praebet ea quae

¹⁶⁰ T. Brian Mooney, *Understanding Teaching*, pp.57-58.

cognoscere volo. Verbis igitur nisi verba non discimus, imo sonitum strepitumque verborum: nam si ea quae signa non sunt, verba esse non possunt, quamvis iam auditum verbum, nescio tamen verbum esse, donec quid significet sciam. Rebus ergo cognitis, verborum quoque cognitio perficitur; verbis vero auditis, nec verba discuntur. Non enim ea verba quae novimus, discimus; aut quae non novimus, didicisse nos possumus confiteri, nisi eorum significatione percepta, quae non auditione vocum emissarum, sed rerum significatarum cognitione contingit. Verissima quippe ratio est, et verissime dicitur, cum verba proferuntur, aut scire nos quid significant, aut nescire: si scimus, commemorari potius quam discere; si autem nescimus, ne commemorari quidem, sed fortasse ad quaerendum admoneri.

[So far as words are to be valued, they invite us to search for realities by reminding us, but they do not present us with realities to be known. On the other hand, whoever teaches me something places before my eyes, or any other corporeal sense, or even to the soul itself, those realities I desire to know. So from words we can only learn words, or rather the sound or noise of words. Even for realities that are not signs, and thus cannot be words, I cannot know that the sound I hear is really a word unless I know what it signifies. So, knowledge of words is perfected by knowledge of realities, but by merely hearing words we do not learn anything about realities. We do not learn words that we already know, and we cannot say that we learn those words that we do not know unless their signification is already understood. This occurs not by hearing words when they are enunciated, but rather by understanding the realities that are signified. It is sound reasoning, and truly said, that when words are pronounced we either already know what they signify or we do not; if we already know, then we remember rather than learn, but if we do not know, we are not even reminded, though perhaps we are prompted to ask questions.] (11.36)

As Louis Mackay writes ‘the decisive consideration is that all signs demand interpretation before they can teach you anything, and that the only reliable guide to the interpretation of any sign is a knowledge of the thing signified. What we seem to learn from signs is not in fact so learned, and the sign, therefore, teaches us nothing [...] Signs function at best as reminders, occasioning me to remember what I have already learned without signs’.¹⁶¹

SCRIPTURAL SIGNS

With the expulsion from Paradise, man ‘id est in peccatorum ariditate constituto, necessariam esse de humanis verbis divinam doctrinam, tamquam de nubibus pluviam’ [has become dried up by his sins, has need of divine teaching from human words, like rain from the clouds] (DGCM 2.5.6). However, this knowledge is no longer transparent but obscured through the enigma and ambiguity of unreliable signs. With the loss of meaning that comes with the split relationship between the concept, sign, and reality along with the subsequent inability to teach through signs of which all doctrinal activity relies on, how then can anyone learn about Christianity or correctly interpret scriptural signs and effectively preach the message as commanded by Christ in Mark 16.15: ‘euntes in mundum universum praedicate evangelium omni creaturae’ [Go ye into the whole world and preach the gospel to every creature]? Indeed, according to Augustine himself in *De doctrina Christiana*, scriptural language was subject to the post-lapsarian decay of the sign and further fell foul of man’s sin and the loss of communication that the building of the Tower of Babel brought.

Ex quo factum est ut etiam Scriptura divina, qua tantis morbis humanarum voluntatum subvenitur, ab una lingua profecta, qua opportune potuit per orbem terrarum disseminari, per varias interpretum linguas longe lateque diffusa innotesceret Gentibus ad salutem. Quam legentes nihil aliud appetunt quam cogitationes voluntatemque illorum a quibus conscripta est

¹⁶¹ Louis Mackey, *Peregrination of the Word: Essays in Medieval Philosophy* (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Press, 1997), pp.61-62.

invenire et per illas voluntatem Dei, secundum quam tales homines locutos credimus. (DDC 2.5.6)

[And hence it happened that even Holy Scripture, which brings a remedy for the terrible diseases of the human will, being at first set forth in one language, by means of which it could at the fit season be disseminated through the whole world, was interpreted into various tongues, and spread far and wide, and thus became known to the nations for their salvation. And in reading it, men seek nothing more than to find out the thought and will of those by whom it was written, and through these to find out the will of God, in accordance with which they believe these men to have spoken.]

Augustine overcomes this apparently insuperable barrier by introducing the thesis of the interior teacher which is a key theme throughout many of his works such as *De doctrina Christiana*, *Confessiones*, *De civitate Dei* and forms the ending of *De magistro*, where he writes:

De universis autem quae intellegimus non loquentem qui personat foris, sed intus ipsi menti praesidentem consulimus veritatem, verbis fortasse ut consulamus admoniti. Ille autem qui consulitur, docet, qui in interiore homine habitare dictus est Christus, id est incommutabilis Dei Virtus atque sempiterna Sapientia: quam quidem omnis rationalis anima consulit. (*De magistro* XI. 38)

[Now, of all the things that we understand, we consult not the words that are expressed in an exterior fashion, but rather the interior custodian, truth, within the soul, perhaps because we have been alerted to do so by means of words. Moreover, the one who is consulted, is He who is the Teacher, Christ, who is said to dwell in the interior man, in other words, the

immutable Power and eternal Wisdom of God, to whom every rational soul pays heed.]

Thus, all signs are open to error and truth is only grasped by the student through the ‘inner man’, the interior light and this light and interior teacher is identified with Christ, the Logos, ‘the eternal Word of God, present within each and every act of understanding’.¹⁶² God and Truth cannot be found in the world of bodies. This is reiterated by Augustine:

Ergo ne hunc quidem doceo vera dicens, vera intuentem; docetur enim non verbis meis, sed ipsis rebus, Deo intus pandente, manifestis:

[As a result, even though I speak truly about reality, I still cannot teach someone, for he must contemplate truth for himself. He is taught not by my words but by realities that he sees and that God reveals to him inwardly.] (*De magistro* XII.40)

However, the student wishing to know the truth must be a believer of an internal authority as opposed to the external authority of an exterior teacher using external words. That interior authority, as learned from Augustine’s thesis, is Christ, the *Logos*. Furthermore, the student or interpreter of signs must be worthy enough to receive this gift of truth and understanding: ‘sed tantum cuique panditur, quantum capere propter propriam, sive malam sive bonam voluntatem potest’ [But to each is revealed only so much as can be received depending upon the perfection of the will.] (*De magistro* XI.38).

This interior teacher extends to the interpretation of scriptural signs as well and according to Cary ‘the implication for Augustine’s view of Scripture is far-reaching: we do not learn the truth from the words of Scripture, no matter how accurately we interpret them, but by seeing it inwardly in our own minds’.¹⁶³ Gower, too, understands the

¹⁶² T. Brian Mooney, *Understand Teaching and Learning*, p.66.

¹⁶³ Cary, *Outward Signs*, p.136.

powerlessness of the external scriptural word by itself. When discussing the ‘newe secte of Lollardie’ (CA, Prologue, 349) he writes:

Among the clerkes in hemselve
It were betre dike and delve
And stonde upon the ryhte feith,
Than knowe al that the Bible seith
And erre as somme clerkes do (CA, Prologue, 351-355)

Gower remarks that, rather than being a slave to the external word of fallen language contained in the Bible, which often leads to misinterpretation as the Lollard clerks have clearly fallen prey to, it is better to be a ploughman¹⁶⁴ digging in the field with little understanding of the written word but wholly reliant on a faith which allows access to the interior truth of Christ.¹⁶⁵ The interpreter of signs, most importantly biblical signs, must also labour for understanding as Adam toils the post-lapsarian ground and in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*. Augustine tells us that with ‘pious diligence’ the exegete should ‘search out the secrets of these words and it would be given to those who ask, and those who seek would find, and it would be opened to those who knock’ (DGCM 2.2.3).

¹⁶⁴ In Chaucer’s description of the Plowman in the General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales* he describes him with this same phrase as Gower: ‘He wolde thresshe, and therto dyke and delve / For Cristes sake’ (CT, I (A) 536-537).

¹⁶⁵ There are definite echoes of Ephesians 3:14-19 in Gower’s passage. It states:

‘huius rei gratia flecto genua mea ad Patrem Domini nostri Iesu Christi ex quo omnis paternitas in caelis et in terra nominator ut det vobis secundum divitias gloriae suae virtute corroborari per Spiritum eius in interiore homine habitare Christum per fidem in cordibus vestris in caritate radicati et fundati ut possitis comprehendere cum omnibus sanctis quae sit latitudo et longitudo et sublimitas et profundum scire etiam supereminentem scientiae caritatem Christi ut impleamini in omnem plenitudinem Dei’

[For this cause I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom all paternity in heaven and earth is named: that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened by his Spirit with might unto the inward man: that Christ may dwell by faith in your hearts: that, being rooted and founded in charity you may be able to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, to know also the charity of Christ, which surpasseth all knowledge: that you may be filled unto all the fullness of God]

All Vulgate text (Latin and English) is taken from here <<http://www.latinvulgate.com>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

Similarly, in *De doctrina Christiana*, a treatise dedicated to inherent problems in the hermeneutics and teaching of scriptural signs, he points out the human necessity for the labour of exegesis of Scripture.

Sed multis et multiplicibus obscuritatibus et ambiguitatibus decipiuntur qui temere legunt, aliud pro alio sentientes; quibusdam autem locis quid vel falso suspicentur non inveniunt, ita obscure dicta quaedam densissimam caliginem obducunt. Quod totum provisum esse divinitus non dubito, ad edomandam labore superbiam et intellectum a fastidio renovandum, cui facile investigata plerumque vilescunt. (DDC 2.6.7)

[But hasty and careless readers are led astray by many and manifold obscurities and ambiguities, substituting one meaning for another; and in some places they cannot hit upon even a fair interpretation. Some of the expressions are so obscure as to shroud the meaning in the thickest darkness. And I do not doubt that all this was divinely arranged for the purpose of subduing pride by toil, and of preventing a feeling of satiety in the intellect, which generally holds in small esteem what is discovered without difficulty.]

SPOLIATIO AEGYPTIORUM AND THE PLEASURE OF FICTION

In *De doctrina Christiana* Augustine acknowledges the struggle of scriptural interpretation and the arduous process of this labour of exegesis, the ambiguity of signs, and the difficulty in recognising the spiritual reading over the carnal. To help the exegete in his efforts he writes:

Philosophi autem qui vocantur, si qua forte vera et fidei nostrae accomodata dixerunt, maxime Platonici, non solum formidanda non sunt, sed ab eis etiam tamquam ab iniustis possessoribus in usum nostrum vindicanda. Sicut enim Aegyptii non tantum idola habebant et onera

gravia, quae populus Israel detestaretur et fugeret, sed etiam vasa atque ornamenta de auro et de argento et vestem, quae ille populus exiens de Aegypto sibi potius tamquam ad usum meliorem clanculo vindicavit, non auctoritate propria, sed praecepto Dei, ipsis Aegyptiis nescienter commodantibus ea quibus non bene utebantur; sic doctrinae omnes Gentilium non solum simulata et superstitiosa figmenta gravesque sarcinas supervacanei laboris habent, quae unusquisque nostrum, duce Christo, de societate Gentilium exiens, debet abominari atque devitare, sed etiam liberales disciplinas usui veritatis aptiores et quaedam morum praecepta utilissima continent, deque ipso uno Deo colendo nonnulla vera inveniuntur apud eos. (DDC 2.40.60)

[Moreover, if those who are called philosophers, and especially the Platonists, have said anything that is true and in harmony with our faith, we are not only not to shrink from it, but to claim it for our own use from those who have unlawful possession of it. For, as the Egyptians had not only the idols and heavy burdens which the people of Israel hated and fled from, but also vessels and ornaments of gold and silver, and garments, which the same people when going out of Egypt appropriated to themselves, designing them for a better use, not doing this on their own authority, but by the command of God, the Egyptians themselves, in their ignorance, providing them with things which they themselves were not making a good use of; in the same way all branches of heathen learning have not only false and superstitious fancies and heavy burdens of unnecessary toil, which every one of us, when going out under the leadership of Christ from the fellowship of the heathen, ought to abhor and avoid; but they contain also liberal instruction which is better adapted to the use of the truth, and some most excellent precepts of morality; and some truths in regard even to the worship of the One God are found among them.]

Augustine, here, writes that it is possible for the interpreter of biblical signs to make use of, as an exegetical aid, the pagan learning that these ‘unlawful possessors’ have provided the Christian ‘in their ignorance’. Augustine expands further on this image in *De doctrina Christiana*:

Quod eorum tamquam aurum et argentum quod non ipsi instituerunt, sed de quibusdam quasi metallis divinae providentiae, quae ubique infusa est, eruerunt, et quo perverse atque iniuriose ad obsequia daemonum abutuntur, cum ab eorum misera societate sese animo separat, debet ab eis auferre Christianus ad usum iustum praedicandi Evangelii. Vestem quoque illorum, id est, hominum quidem instituta, sed tamen accomodata humanae societati qua in hac vita carere non possumus, accipere atque habere licuerit in usum convertenda Christianum.

[Now these are, so to speak, their gold and silver, which they did not create themselves, but dug out of the mines of God's providence which are everywhere scattered abroad, and are perversely and unlawfully prostituting to the worship of devils. These, therefore, the Christian, when he separates himself in spirit from the miserable fellowship of these men, ought to take away from them, and to devote to their proper use in preaching the gospel. Their garments, also - that is, human institutions such as are adapted to that intercourse with men which is indispensable in this life - we must take and turn to a Christian use.]

Augustine points out that human reason is of a divine origin and not man-made and he equates the pagan works, the products of human reason which he has long had a keen interest in, to mined gold. It is clear in *De doctrina Christiana* (Book II) that Augustine is referring predominantly to the philosophical and ethical education of the liberal arts as these pagan riches. The emphasis is on reason and Augustine is encouraging the student to fully refine their divinely-given rational abilities as God intended. Indeed, for Augustine, the wisdom contained in the pagan writings could help to cast light on the

wisdom revealed in the teachings of the Christian faith. He details particular subjects such as music, natural science, rhetoric, dialectic and logic as broad tools to help the exegete in understanding scriptural signs but very significantly stresses that not all pagan knowledge is worthwhile (such as astrology) as so much of it is non-rational, superstitious nonsense. As Chaucer astutely points out in the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* 'But al thing which that shineth as the gold / Nis nat gold' (CT, 409-10). Indeed, as Floyd D. Anderson notes:

Such a despoiling of the riches of the pagan past for the purposes of the emerging new Christian order is, of course, precisely what Augustine himself is up to in *De doctrina Christiana*. Among the pagan riches which he despoils is the classical method for the allegorical interpretation of literature, a method which had been devised centuries earlier, and had undergone subsequent revision by virtually all of the philosophical schools of antiquity. Augustine's own theory of scriptural interpretation in *De doctrina Christiana* represents but one more revision of the classical method. Another of the pagan riches which Augustine despoils is Ciceronian rhetoric, particularly *Orator*, from which he borrows generously in constructing his own theory of Christian eloquence.¹⁶⁶

However, earlier in Book I of *De doctrina Christiana* Augustine writes:

Res ergo aliae sunt quibus fruendum est, aliae quibus utendum, aliae quae fruuntur et utuntur. Illae quibus fruendum est nos beatos faciunt; istis quibus utendum est tendentes ad beatitudinem adiuvamur et quasi adminiculamur, ut ad illas quae nos beatos faciunt, pervenire atque his inhaerere possimus. Nos vero qui fruimur et utimur, inter utrasque constituti, si eis quibus utendum est frui voluerimus, impeditur cursus noster et aliquando etiam deflectitur, ut ab his rebus quibus fruendum est

¹⁶⁶ Floyd D. Anderson, "'De Doctrina Christiana' 2. 18. 28: The Convergence of Athens and Jerusalem", *Rhetoric Society Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 3/4 (Summer-Autumn, 1985), 102-104 (pp.102-103).

obtinendis vel retardemur vel etiam revocemur, inferiorum amore praepediti. (DDC, I, 3. 3)

[There are some things, then, which are to be enjoyed, others which are to be used, others still which enjoy and use. Those things which are objects of enjoyment make us happy. Those things which are objects of use assist, and (so to speak) support us in our efforts after happiness, so that we can attain the things that make us happy and rest in them. We ourselves, again, who enjoy and use these things, being placed among both kinds of objects, if we set ourselves to enjoy those which we ought to use, are hindered in our course, and sometimes even led away from it; so that, getting entangled in the love of lower gratifications, we lag behind in, or even altogether turn back from, the pursuit of the real and proper objects of enjoyment]

Here, Augustine puts forward a key distinction between things that can be enjoyed for their own sake (*frui*) which is a pleasure that can lead away from spiritual truth, or alternatively something that can be used (*uti*) as a means of obtaining higher truth. The only thing rightfully to be enjoyed is God. He writes ‘Res igitur quibus fruendum est, Pater et Filius et Spiritus Sanctus’ [The true objects of enjoyment, then, are the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit] (1.5.5.). One turns towards the world and is about carnal pleasures and the other turns toward God in an act of charity. Christopher Lee writes that ‘unlike pagan philosophy or classical rhetoric which can be despoiled for some Christian *usus*, the literal content of fictive works is so seductive that they tend to remain solely objects of inappropriate enjoyment (*fructus*)’.¹⁶⁷ Thus, according to Augustine the gold of Egypt, the liberal arts, are only to be used to further interpretation of Scripture and not to be enjoyed or employed in and of themselves but in an effort to know God. He writes that ‘Nam usus illicitus abusus potius vel abusio nominandus est’ [an unlawful use ought rather to be called an abuse] (DDC, I, 4).

¹⁶⁷ Christopher Lee, ‘Jewish-Christian Debate and Didacticism of Drama in the *Jeu D’adam*’, *Comitas: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, Volume 38, 2007, 19-41 (p.24).

Reading pagan philosophy exclusive of its role as a tool for biblical exegesis, then, is for Augustine an ‘abuse’ and furthermore with regards to literature and pagan poetry in particular, he takes a characteristic stance in line with Plato, who excluded the traditional poets from his ideal state in his *Republic*. In *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, Augustine writes of poetry that ‘Si enim fictas poetarum fabulas et ad voluptatem excogitatas animorum, quorum cibus nugae sunt’ [the fables of the poets, which are but fictitious creations and things devised for the pleasure of minds whose food is found in trifles].¹⁶⁸ For Augustine, pagan poetry categorically consists only of ‘fables’ and fictions. He goes on to contrast these ‘fables’ with the truthful narrative of Scripture and urges religious teachers of the unlearned not to obscure their message and writes that ‘sed ipsa veritas adhibita rationis quasi aurum sit gemmarum ordinem ligans, non tamen ornamentum seriem ulla immoderatione perturbans’ [the simple truth of the explanation which we adduce ought to be like the gold which binds together a row of gems, and yet does not interfere with the choice symmetry of the ornament by any undue intrusion of itself].¹⁶⁹ This emphasis on fiction and pleasure is repeated in *De doctrina Christiana* when Augustine writes of pagan superstitions and practices and in particular those skilled artists who create pictures and statues as well as ‘millia denique fictarum fabularum et falsitatum, quarum mendaciis homines delectantur, humana instituta sunt. Et nulla magis hominum propria, quae a seipsis habent, existimanda sunt quam quaeque falsa atque mendacia’ [the thousands of fables and fictions, in whose lies men take delight, are human devices, and nothing is to be considered more peculiarly man’s own and derived from himself than anything that is false and lying] (2.25.39). Augustine is clearly equating the fables of the poets with the act of lying which only serves to induce enjoyment and pleasure and, given this then, imaginative poetry can have no place in the explication of spiritual truth or as an instrument for biblical exegesis or as a tool of theological teaching. Similarly, all references to the word ‘fable’ in the *Confessio Amantis* without fail always carries the connotation of untruth/falsehood.¹⁷⁰ H.J. Westra writes that Augustine rejects

¹⁶⁸ St Augustine, *De Catechizandis Rudibus*, (6.10) , PL40, <http://www.augustinus.it/latino/catechesi_cristiana/index.htm> [accessed September 29th 2017], trans. S.D.F. Salmond, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887).

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

¹⁷⁰ Ana Sáez-Hidalgo, “‘Though that it be lich a fable / The ensample is good and reasonable’: Redeeming the Fable in the Iberian *Confessio Amantis*’, conference paper presented at *Gower, His Contemporaries, and Their Legacy In MSS and Early Printed Books 1350 -1550: IVth International Congress of the John Gower Society/15th Biennial Conference of the Early Book Society*, University of Durham, Durham, 9th-14th July 2017.

outright any quasi-salvation of pagan poetry ‘on the epistemological point that its object of knowledge is false or empty’ and ‘in addition to its nefarious aesthetic lure, pagan literature is found to be lacking in truth (Conf. 1.13.22)’.¹⁷¹ A lie is an iniquity, Augustine writes in *De mendacio* (9.15) based on the biblical authority of the ninth Commandment ‘thou shalt not bear false witness’ (Exodus 20:16) and by aligning the fictional signs of poetry with lying and deception, Augustine ultimately leads it back to the genesis of the lie, that first ‘abandonment of truth’ by Adam and Eve and the subsequent crisis of signification in the Garden of Eden. ‘Augustine underlines the moral implications of lying by stating that falsehood was impossible in Eden before the Fall, [*De Libero Arbitrio* 3.20] whereas now, truth is unavailable to us except by divine grace: “For I do not think that I could utter truth save by your inspiration, seeing that You *are true, and every man a liar. And when he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own*” (Rom. 3.4; John 8.44)’.¹⁷²

Poetic content and language is, thus, always bound to the scenario of the Fall and this intentional use of a deceptive mode of signification, a perversion of the original function of language further cements its inability to communicate Christian truth. Indeed, the primary purpose of given signs, according to Augustine, is communication, which, in a post-lapsarian world is marred by confusion and mutability. Therefore, the intentional obscuring of truth through poetic fiction further taints the sign and any communicative power it may have. In terms of *frui* and *uti*, the art of poetry, its ornate language, and its fictional content singularly provides a superficial, sensual pleasure, an earthly enjoyment for its own sake (*frui*) and does not lead to a higher theological truth of any sort (*uti*). Indeed, it actively leads away from Christian truth towards temporal and carnal things constituting what he calls an ‘abuse’.

Augustine recounts this very problem with the fictions of poetry and its personal effect on him in his *Confessiones* where he writes:

Quid enim miserius misero non miserante se ipsum et flente Didonis mortem, quae fiebat amando Aenean, non flente autem mortem suam, quae fiebat non amando te, Deus, lumen cordis mei et panis oris intus

¹⁷¹ H.J. Westra, ‘Augustine and Exegesis’, pp.16-17.

¹⁷² Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.25.

animae meae et virtus maritans mentem meam et sinum cogitationis meae? Non te amabam et fornicabar abs te et fornicanti sonabat undique: Euge, euge. Amicitia enim mundi huius fornicatio est abs te et Euge, euge dicitur, ut pudeat, si non ita homo sit. Et haec non flebam et flebam Didonem extinctam ferroque extrema secutam, sequens ipse extrema condita tua relicto te et terra iens in terram; et si prohiberer ea legere, dolerem, quia non legerem quod dolerem. Talis dementia honestiores et uberiores litterae putantur quam illae, quibus legere et scribere didici.¹⁷³ (1.13.21)

[For what can be more wretched than the wretch who pities not himself shedding tears over the death of Dido for love of Æneas, but shedding no tears over his own death in not loving You, O God, light of my heart, and bread of the inner mouth of my soul, and the power that weddest my mind with my innermost thoughts? I did not love You, and committed fornication against You; and those around me thus sinning cried, Well done! Well done! For the friendship of this world is fornication against You; and Well done! Well done! is cried until one feels ashamed not to be such a man. And for this I shed no tears, though I wept for Dido, who sought death at the sword's point, myself the while seeking the lowest of Your creatures - having forsaken You - earth tending to the earth; and if forbidden to read these things, how grieved would I feel that I was not permitted to read what grieved me. This sort of madness is considered a more honourable and more fruitful learning than that by which I learned to read and write.]¹⁷⁴

¹⁷³St Augustine, *Confessiones*, PL32, <<http://www.augustinus.it/latino/confessioni/index2.htm>> [accessed September 29th 2017]. All Latin text is taken from this edition unless otherwise stated.

¹⁷⁴J.G. Pilkington, trans., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887).

‘In mingled contempt for himself and his reading, Augustine rejects pagan literature, even his beloved Virgil, as distraction and delusion’ as John Savoie notes.¹⁷⁵ In being moved to tears, persuaded to react emotionally to a non-real, fictional poetic character Augustine has been led away through poetic language from spiritual pursuits and theological truth towards inconsequential, false earthly concerns. Not only can literature divert attention away from proper true things but Augustine shows that it can, in fact, be harmful as well. He writes later in his *Confessiones*:

Nonne ego in te legi et tonantem Iovem et adulterantem? Et utique non posset haec duo, sed actum est, ut haberet auctoritatem imitandum verum adulterium lenocinante falso tonitru. Quis autem paenulorum magistrorum audit aure sobria ex eodem pulvere hominem clamantem et dicentem: Fingebat haec Homerus et humana ad deos transferebat; divina mallet ad nos? Sed verius dicitur, quod fingebat haec quidem ille, sed hominibus flagitiosis divina tribuendo, ne flagitia flagitia putarentur et ut quisquis ea fecisset, non homines perditos, sed caelestes deos videretur imitatus. (1.16.25)

[Do I not read in you of Jove the thunderer and adulterer? And the two verily he could not be; but it was that, while the fictitious thunder served as a cloak, he might have warrant to imitate real adultery. Yet which of our gowned masters can lend a temperate ear to a man of his school who cries out and says: These were Homer's fictions; he transfers things human to the gods. I could have wished him to transfer divine things to us. But it would have been more true had he said: These are, indeed, his fictions, but he attributed divine attributes to sinful men, that crimes might not be accounted crimes, and that whosoever committed any might appear to imitate the celestial gods and not abandoned men.]

¹⁷⁵ John Savoie, ‘Justifying the Ways of God and Man: Theodicy in Augustine and Milton’, in *Augustine and Literature*, eds Robert P. Kennedy, Kim Paffenroth, and John Doody (Oxford: Lexington Books, 2006), pp.139-154, p.150.

Here, Augustine suggests that the fictions of literature, and particularly Homer in this case, are accustomed to giving divine qualities to mortal flawed men who sin and thus these works of literature may subsequently encourage men to imitate these so-called gods in their moral deviations. In the example offered, Augustine worries that the reader may think that by allowing Jove to be both god and adulterer Homer is in effect advocating adultery in the real world. To further emphasise this point that literature can in fact incite immorality, Augustine gives an example from Terence where the protagonist on seeing a picture of Jupiter's sexual conquest of Danaë uses it to defend his own rape of a virgin remarking 'if he can, why can't I?' (*Confessiones*, 1.16.26).

The use of literature in religious doctrine is a particular problem for Augustine, who writes explicitly in *De mendacio*, his treatise on lying:

quomodo credendum est ei qui putat aliquando esse mentiendum, ne forte et tunc mentiatur cum praecipit ut credamus? Unde enim sciri potest utrum et tunc habeat aliquam causam, sicut ipse putat, officiosi mendacii, existimans falsa narratione hominem territum posse a libidine cohiberi, atque hoc modo etiam ad spiritalia se consulere mentiendo arbitretur? Quo genere admissio atque approbatio, omnis omnino fidei disciplina subvertitur; qua subversa, nec ad intellegentiam pervenitur, cui capiendae ista paruulos nutrit: atque ita omnis doctrina veritatis aufertur, cedens licentiosissimae falsitati, si mendacio velut officioso alicunde penetrandi aperitur locus. Aut enim temporalia commoda, vel propria vel aliena, veritati praeponit, quicumque mentitur; quo quid fieri potest peruersius? aut cum veritati adipiscendae opitulante mendacio vult facere idoneum, intercludit aditum veritati; volens enim cum mentitur esse aptus, fit cum verum dicit incertus. (8.11)¹⁷⁶

¹⁷⁶ St Augustine, *De mendacio*, PL40, < <http://www.augustinus.it/latino/menzogna/index.htm> > [accessed September 29th 2017].

[how can there be any believing one who thinks it is sometimes right to lie, lest haply he lie at the moment when he teaches us to believe? For how can it be known whether he have at that moment some cause, as he thinks, for a well-meant lie, deeming that by a false story a man may be frightened and kept from lust, and in this way account that by telling a lie he is doing good even in spiritual things? Which kind of lie once admitted and approved, all discipline of faith is subverted altogether; and this being subverted, neither is there any attaining to understanding, for the receiving of which that discipline nurtures the babes: and so all the doctrine of truth is done away, giving place to most licentious falsehood, if a lie, even well-meant, may from any quarter have place opened for it to enter in. For either whoso tells a lie prefers temporal advantages, his own or another's, to truth; than which what can be more perverse? Or when by aid of a lie he wishes to make a person fit for gaining the truth, he bars the approach to truth, for by wishing when he lies to be accommodating, it comes to pass that when he speaks the truth, he cannot be depended upon.]¹⁷⁷

Augustine is quite clear here, the use of ‘false stories’, fables, or literary fictions in an effort to morally dissuade, in this case, someone from committing an act of lust is tantamount to lying and not acting in good faith at all. The co-mingling of fiction and spiritual truth only serves to break down and destroy any semblance of that truth. It further muddies the authority of the person telling the ‘fiction’ which leaves the student in doubt and confused as to what is true or not. This is better clarified later on in *De mendacio*:

Quamobrem a doctrina religionis, atque ab eis omnino enuntiationibus, quae propter doctrinam religionis enuntiantur, cum illa docetur et discitur, omnia penitus mendacia removenda sunt. Nec ulla omnino causa inveniri posse credatur, cur in rebus talibus mentiendum sit: quando nec ideo in ea doctrina mentiendum est, ut ad eam ipsam quisque facilius perducatur.

¹⁷⁷ H. Browne, trans., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 3, ed. Philip Schaff. (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887).

Fracta enim vel leviter diminuta auctoritate veritatis, omnia dubia remanebunt: quae nisi vera credantur, teneri certa non possunt (10.17)

[Wherefore, from the doctrine of religion, and from those utterances universally, which are uttered on behalf of the doctrine of religion, in the teaching and learning of the same, all lies must be utterly kept aloof. Nor can any cause whatever be found, one should think, why a lie should be told in matters of this kind, when in this doctrine it is not right to tell a lie for the very purpose of bringing a person to it the more easily. For, once break or but slightly diminish the authority of truth, and all things will remain doubtful: which unless they be believed true, cannot be held as certain.]

Fictions and lies have no place in Christian edification and doctrine. The former diminishes the latter and everything is rendered uncertain and confused. This has strong implications for Gower's ambitious exhortation to go the 'middel weie' (CA, Prologue, 17) in the opening lines of the *Confessio*, endeavouring to impart moral instruction through a blend of 'lust' and 'lore', fiction with fact (CA, Prologue, 18).

AUGUSTINE'S RHETORIC OF SILENCE

As we have seen thus far, Augustine views the 'word' as an external sign, part of a world of bodies that is post-lapsarian. With the fall and the fleshly alienation from the divine inner word and interior spring of knowledge, the sign has lost its true signification. And because of its lower ontology it is powerless to give true expression to the concepts within us. Even though the function of the verbal sign is to instruct, nothing can be taught through signs but can only admonish the student towards the inner truth of Christ. However, Marcia Colish writes that 'Medieval Christians believed that Christ the Word was God's perfect expression of Himself to man. Having taken on a human nature and having expiated man's sin, Christ had restored man to God. Previously vitiated by sin, the human mind could now come to a knowledge of God in Christ; and the human faculty of speech could now participate in the Incarnation by helping to spread the Word to the

world'.¹⁷⁸ What Colish is suggesting is the reformation of human speech and a reinstatement of the ability of words to signify realities. As Fyler points out 'Colish has outlined in detail the Augustinian paradigm of history, in which human language falls farther and farther from its divine exemplar, until Christ the Incarnate Word, the second Adam born of the second Eve, graces us with the possibility of redeemed speech'.¹⁷⁹ Certainly, Augustine's body of work and his view of the Incarnation are logocentric, in that they are centred in language but as S. K. Heninger writes 'The Greek *logos* does not mean the *uttered* word, but rather the *idea* that the uttered word signifies. To use the familiar terminology of Saussure, the *logos* is the "signified", not the "signifier". In the popular gospel according to St John, Christ appeared to human kind as the *logos*, and of course, He brought a message of uttered words. But what counted was the *meaning* of His message, the doctrine, the *logos*. That, rather than its verbalization, was what existed in the beginning'.¹⁸⁰ Augustine demonstrates this very idea when he purposefully fuses the internal operations of reason with that of the Word writing in his *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*: 'In principio erat Verbum [John 1:1] Quod graece *logos* dicitur latine et rationem et verbum significat'¹⁸¹ [In the beginning was the Word (John 1:1). The Greek word *logos* signifies in Latin both reason and word.]¹⁸² The *logos* is an inner experience rather than outer one.

In Gower's own understanding of the Incarnation he writes 'Ther is a feith aboven alle, / In which trouthe is comprehended, / Wherof that we ben alle amended'. (CA, V, 1734-36). Christianity is the religion that allows full understanding of truth and he writes that:

Crist wroghte ferst and after tawhte,
 So that the dede His Word arawhte;
 He gaf ensample in His persone,

¹⁷⁸ Colish, *The Mirror of Language*, p.ix –x.

¹⁷⁹ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.7.

¹⁸⁰ S.K. Heninger, Jr, 'Spenser, Sidney, and Poetic Form', *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 88, No. 2, (Spring, 1991), 140-152 (p.146).

¹⁸¹ St Augustine, *De diversis quaestionibus octoginta tribus*, PL40, Q.63, <http://www.augustinus.it/latino/ottantatre_questioni/index2.htm> [accessed September 29th 2017].

¹⁸² St Augustine, *On Eighty-Three Different Questions*, trans. David L. Mosher (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1982).

And we the wordes have al one. (CA, V, 1825-1828)

Gower is telling us that Christ's deeds came first, followed afterwards by his words. Thus, he is demonstrating the meaning of the divine message before uttering it in human language. He is giving signification to the signifier. External signs still cannot teach the student anything other than signs, but in the presence of the true signified, that is Christ and his works, meaning and truth can be taught. Furthermore, if human language was redeemed and able to reflect realities truthfully after the Incarnation, then Augustine would have had no great difficulty at articulating his inner thoughts as a baby. Indeed, there would be no need to laboriously toil to be understood as he did throughout his infancy as recounted in Book I of his *Confessiones*. Nor, equally, would there be a necessity to struggle to understand the ambiguous and unknown signs of Scripture, a hermeneutics which is the basis for his *De doctrina Christiana*. All meaning would always and instantly be comprehended. Christ was born in time, with a temporal body that expired as all human flesh does, but his divine message is eternal. Thus, in this same way external, human signs are still inadequate, powerless to signify truth in a post-Incarnational world but if the worthy exegete or student casts off the cacophony of outward worldly noise, turning, instead, inward toward the soul it may be possible to hear, then, the *logos*, the inner divine word, the interior teacher of Christ. The Incarnation allows, once again, for humans, who follow the Christological 'ensample in His persone', to be irrigated from within as the soul was in pre-lapsarian Eden. Throughout all of Augustine's works, then, there appears to be a major shift away from external signs altogether and towards the interior. I argue that this interior is facilitated by silence.

As Joseph Anthony Mazzeo points out, Augustine had a deep fascination with silence and that 'a philosophical theology of silence was present in both Platonism and Christianity, and the latter began to develop it quite early. Its roots can be found in Pauline texts such as Romans 6, 25-26 "the revelation of the mystery which was kept secret since the world began" and Hebrews 3, 11-18 and 4, 1-11 where St Paul describes the inability of the Israelites to rest in Canaan and the superior rest available to the believer, of which God's rest after the creation is a type'.¹⁸³ This can be demonstrated by Augustine's utter

¹⁸³ Joseph Anthony Mazzeo, 'St Augustine's Rhetoric of Silence', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Vol. 23, No. 2, (April-June, 1962), 175-196 (p.192).

captivation when he stumbles across his teacher Ambrose reading silently in Book VI of his *Confessiones*. It is of such great importance to Augustine's life that I quote in full. He writes:

Non enim quaerere ab eo poteram quod volebam, sicut volebam, secludentibus me ab eius aure atque ore catervis negotiorum hominum, quorum infirmitatibus serviebat; cum quibus quando non erat, quod perexiguum temporis erat, aut corpus reficiebat necessariis sustentaculis aut lectione animum. Sed cum legebat, oculi ducebantur per paginas et cor intellectum rimabatur, vox autem et lingua quiescebant. Saepe cum adessemus (non enim vetabatur quisquam ingredi aut ei venientem nuntiari mos erat) sic eum legentem vidimus tacite et aliter numquam sedentesque in diuturno silentio (quis enim tam intento esse oneri auderet?) discedebamus et coniectabamus eum parvo ipso tempore, quod reparandae menti suae nanciscebatur, feriatum ab strepitu causarum alienarum nolle in aliud avocari et cavere fortasse, ne auditore suspenso et intento, si qua obscurius posuisset ille quem legeret, etiam exponere esset necesse aut de aliquibus difficilioribus dissertare quaestionibus atque huic operi temporibus impensis minus quam vellet voluminum evolveret, quamquam et causa servandae vocis, quae illi facillime obtundebatur, poterat esse iustior tacite legendi. Quolibet tamen animo id ageret, bono utique ille vir agebat.¹⁸⁴

[For I could not request of him what I wished as I wished, in that I was debarred from hearing and speaking to him by crowds of busy people, whose infirmities he devoted himself to. With whom when he was not engaged (which was but a little time), he either was refreshing his body with necessary sustenance, or his mind with reading. But while reading, his eyes glanced over the pages, and his heart searched out the sense, but his voice and tongue were silent. Ofttimes, when we had come (for no one

¹⁸⁴ St Augustine, *Confessiones*, PL 32, VI, 3.3 <<http://www.augustinus.it/latino/confessiononi/index2.htm>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

was forbidden to enter, nor was it his custom that the arrival of those who came should be announced to him), we saw him thus reading to himself, and never otherwise; and, having long sat in silence (for who dared interrupt one so intent?), we were fain to depart, inferring that in the little time he secured for the recruiting of his mind, free from the clamour of other men's business, he was unwilling to be taken off. And perchance he was fearful lest, if the author he studied should express anything vaguely, some doubtful and attentive hearer should ask him to expound it, or to discuss some of the more abstruse questions, as that, his time being thus occupied, he could not turn over as many volumes as he wished; although the preservation of his voice, which was very easily weakened, might be the truer reason for his reading to himself. But whatever was his motive in so doing, doubtless in such a man was a good one.]¹⁸⁵

And ‘St. Ambrose’s “good reason” for silence was nothing else than listening to the instruction of the inner teacher’.¹⁸⁶ Through his meditative silence, Ambrose was shutting out all worldly noise, rejecting all things external, in an effort to consult the divine *logos*. As Mazzeo quite rightly remarks, this passage bears an incredible similarity to Augustine’s account of his own conversion in Book VIII of his *Confessiones*.

Dicebam haec et flebam amarissima contritione cordis mei. Et ecce audio vocem de vicina domo cum cantu dicentis et crebro repetentis quasi pueri an puellae, nescio: “Tolle lege, tolle lege”. Statimque mutato vultu intentissimus cogitare coepi, utrumnam solerent pueri in aliquo genere ludendi cantitare tale aliquid, nec occurrebat omnino audisse me uspiam repressoque impetu lacrimarum surrexi nihil aliud interpretans divinitus mihi iuberi, nisi ut aperirem codicem et legerem quod primum caput invenissem. Audieram enim de Antonio, quod ex evangelica lectione, cui

¹⁸⁵ St Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. J.G. Pilkington, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, First Series, Vol. 1, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1887). Revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight. <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/110106.htm>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

¹⁸⁶ Mazzeo, ‘Rhetoric of Silence’, p.192.

forte supervenerat, admonitus fuerit, tamquam sibi diceretur quod legebatur: Vade, vende omnia, quae habes, da pauperibus et habebis thesaurum in caelis; et veni, sequere me, et tali oraculo confestim ad te esse conversum. Itaque concitus redii in eum locum, ubi sedebat Alypius; ibi enim posueram codicem Apostoli, cum inde surrexeram. Arripui, aperui et legi in silentio capitulum, quo primum coniecti sunt oculi mei: Non in comessationibus et ebrietatibus, non in cubilibus et impudiciis, non in contentione et aemulatione, sed induite Dominum Iesum Christum et carnis providentiam ne feceritis in concupiscentiis. Nec ultra volui legere nec opus erat. Statim quippe cum fine huiusce sententiae quasi luce securitatis infusa cordi meo omnes dubitationis tenebrae diffugerunt.¹⁸⁷

[I was saying these things and weeping in the most bitter contrition of my heart, when, lo, I heard the voice as of a boy or girl, I know not which, coming from a neighbouring house, chanting, and oft repeating, Take up and read; take up and read. Immediately my countenance was changed, and I began most earnestly to consider whether it was usual for children in any kind of game to sing such words; nor could I remember ever to have heard the like. So, restraining the torrent of my tears, I rose up, interpreting it no other way than as a command to me from Heaven to open the book, and to read the first chapter I should light upon. For I had heard of Antony, that, accidentally coming in while the gospel was being read, he received the admonition as if what was read were addressed to him, Go and sell that you have, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me. Matthew 19:21 And by such oracle was he immediately converted unto You. So quickly I returned to the place where Alypius was sitting; for there had I put down the volume of the apostles, when I rose thence. I grasped, opened, and in silence read that paragraph on which my eyes first fell - Not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying; but put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts

¹⁸⁷ St Augustine, *Confessiones*, PL 32, VIII, 12.29, <<http://www.augustinus.it/latino/confessioni/index2.htm>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

thereof. Romans 13:13-14 No further would I read, nor did I need; for instantly, as the sentence ended - by a light, as it were, of security infused into my heart - all the gloom of doubt vanished away.] (VIII, 12.29)

We notice, here, that at the very moment of conversion, Augustine eschews the external word and reads silently. He is at once rewarded with divine illumination internally in his heart, answered by the silent inner teacher of Christ.

Furthermore, if we examine one of Augustine's most famous passages in Book IX of his *Confessiones* - that of the vision at Ostia that he shares with his mother Monica. Here, both mother and son get a fleeting glimpse of the truth 'where by the grace of God the words spoken and heard actually succeed in directing both minds to see with some clarity what they are trying to understand'.¹⁸⁸

Cumque ad eum finem sermo perduceretur, ut carnalium sensuum delectatio quantalibet in quantalibet luce corporea prae illius vitae iucunditate non comparatione, sed ne commemoratione quidem digna videretur, erigentes nos ardentiore affectu in id ipsum perambulavimus gradatim cuncta corporalia et ipsum caelum, unde sol et luna et stellae lucent super terram. Et adhuc ascendebamus interius cogitando et loquendo et mirando opera tua et venimus in mentes nostras et transcendimus eas, ut attingeremus regionem ubertatis indeficientis, ubi pascis Israel in aeternum veritate pabulo, et ibi vita sapientia est, per quam fiunt omnia ista, et quae fuerunt et quae futura sunt, et ipsa non fit, sed sic est, ut fuit, et sic erit semper. Quin potius fuisse et futurum esse non est in ea, sed esse solum, quoniam aeterna est; nam fuisse et futurum esse non est aeternum. Et dum loquimur et inhiamus illi, attingimus eam modice toto ictu cordis; et suspiravimus et reliquimus ibi religatas primitias spiritus et remeavimus ad strepitum oris nostri, ubi verbum et incipitur et finitur. Et quid simile Verbo tuo, Domino nostro, in se permanenti sine vetustate atque innovanti omnia? (IX, 10.24)

¹⁸⁸ Cary, *Outward Signs*, p.12.

[And when our conversation had arrived at that point, that the very highest pleasure of the carnal senses, and that in the very brightest material light, seemed by reason of the sweetness of that life not only not worthy of comparison, but not even of mention, we, lifting ourselves with a more ardent affection towards the Selfsame, did gradually pass through all corporeal things, and even the heaven itself, whence sun, and moon, and stars shine upon the earth; yea, we soared higher yet by inward musing, and discoursing, and admiring Your works; and we came to our own minds, and went beyond them, that we might advance as high as that region of unfailing plenty, where You feed Israel for ever with the food of truth, and where life is that Wisdom by whom all these things are made, both which have been, and which are to come; and she is not made, but is as she has been, and so shall ever be; yea, rather, to have been, and to be hereafter, are not in her, but only to be, seeing she is eternal, for to have been and to be hereafter are not eternal. And while we were thus speaking, and straining after her, we slightly touched her with the whole effort of our heart; and we sighed, and there left bound the first-fruits of the Spirit; Romans 8:23 and returned to the noise of our own mouth, where the word uttered has both beginning and end. And what is like Your Word, our Lord, who remains in Himself without becoming old, and makes all things new? Wisdom 7:27]

Indeed, though Augustine and Monica continue to talk throughout this whole experience, it is the words themselves that efficaciously admonish and guide them (the only power words have) to turn away from all things external and corporeal and, instead, to turn toward the inward silent musings allowing them both to transcend all corporeal noise and distractions until they catch sight of the inner light of Truth, which is God. Augustine and Monica then fall away from the heights of the eternal inner word back down again to external and temporal language in a re-enactment, in parvo, of the fall from Paradise. They further both desire a world where all external sounds cease and creature and word are all silent. Augustine writes:

Dicebamus ergo: “Si cui sileat tumultus carnis, sileant phantasiae terrae et aquarum et aeris, sileant et poli et ipsa sibi anima sileat et transeat se non se cogitando, sileant somnia et imaginariae revelationes, omnis lingua et omne signum et quidquid transeundo fit si cui sileat omnino (quoniam si quis audiat, dicunt haec omnia: “Non ipsa nos fecimus, sed fecit nos qui manet in aeternum”) his dictis si iam taceant, quoniam erexerunt aurem in eum, qui fecit ea, et loquatur ipse solus non per ea, sed per se ipsum, ut audiamus verbum eius, non per linguam carnis neque per vocem angeli nec per sonitum nubis nec per aenigma similitudinis, sed ipsum, quem in his amamus, ipsum sine his audiamus, sicut nunc extendimus nos et rapida cogitatione attingimus, aeternam sapientiam super omnia manentem, si continetur hoc et subtrahantur aliae visiones longe imparis generis et haec una rapiat et absorbeat et recondat in interiora gaudia spectatorem suum, ut talis sit sempiterna vita, quale fuit hoc momentum intellegentiae, cui suspiravimus, nonne hoc est: Intra in gaudium Domini tui? Et istud quando? An cum omnes resurgimus, sed non omnes immutabimur?” (IX, 10.25)

[We were saying, then, If to any man the tumult of the flesh were silenced - silenced the phantasies of earth, waters, and air - silenced, too, the poles; yea, the very soul be silenced to herself, and go beyond herself by not thinking of herself - silenced fancies and imaginary revelations, every tongue, and every sign, and whatsoever exists by passing away, since, if any could hearken, all these say, We created not ourselves, but were created by Him who abides for ever: If, having uttered this, they now should be silenced, having only quickened our ears to Him who created them, and He alone speak not by them, but by Himself, that we may hear His word, not by fleshly tongue, nor angelic voice, nor sound of thunder, nor the obscurity of a similitude, but might hear Him - Him whom in these we love - without these, like as we two now strained ourselves, and with rapid thought touched on that Eternal Wisdom which remains over all. If

this could be sustained, and other visions of a far different kind be withdrawn, and this one ravish, and absorb, and envelope its beholder amid these inward joys, so that his life might be eternally like that one moment of knowledge which we now sighed after, were not this Enter into the joy of Your Lord? Matthew 25:21 And when shall that be? When we shall all rise again; but all shall not be changed.]

Cary writes that ‘If all external sounds ceased and became silent, then we would hear a different kind of word, one without beginning or end, the Word of eternity, not the sounding of temporary words of our mouths and tongues [...] For Augustine words are inadequate to express what lies within because what we see most deeply within is God, who is both Wisdom and Truth, visible to the mind but far beyond the power of words to convey. “It can be understood ineffably,” he says’.¹⁸⁹ Truth and the *logos* can only be heard inwardly through silence.

Thus, having offered an extensive analysis of Augustine’s complex and far-reaching semiotic theory we can now turn to Gower’s own views of language, in light of this philosophical framework, by first examining a short but crucial passage dedicated to ‘rethorique’.

¹⁸⁹ Cary, *Outward Signs*, p.13.

II: 'RETHORIQUE IS TO DESPISE'

Patrick J. Gallacher writes that 'each of the Seven Deadly Sins has a verbal manifestation' explaining that 'Pride makes a man boastful; Envy nettles him into backbiting; Wrath provokes quarrelsomeness. Sloth holds him in a stupefied silence. Avarice makes him stingy even in what he says. Gluttony inordinately whets his appetite for his lady's voice, and Lust makes his conversation lascivious'.¹⁹⁰ If we follow the *Confessio Amantis*' *ordinatio* of the seven deadly sins up to this point, Book VII ought to discuss this latter vice of Lust. It is in this book that we find Gower's small but integral section on language and rhetoric. Book VII's content, as Amans' confessor 'Genius, the prest of love' (CA, VII, 1) explains, is 'nought in the registre of Venus', (the written rules and records of Venus)¹⁹¹; not regarding 'amour', but supposedly describes 'al that to a king belongeth' (CA, VI, 2413). Specifically, Genius is to impart what 'Calistre / And Aristotle whylom write / To Alisaundre' (CA, VII, 20-22), what the philosophers Callisthenes and Aristotle wrote for and to the Macedonian young king. T. Matthew N. McCabe asserts that Genius' allusion to Aristotle and 'Calistre' appears to show his direct access to ancient pagan texts or letters.¹⁹² Thus, from the beginning of Book VII, Genius reveals that he is to rely singularly on signs and, in particular, knowledge arising from the written/textual sign ('whyлом write'). It seems he is to swap one textual tradition (Venus) for another (Aristotle). And so, Book VII, is to modify its subject matter to that of education and, in particular, the Aristotelian edification of Alexander the Great. It focally shifts from a poem concerned primarily with the trials and tribulations, the vices and virtues of love and the lover to a 'mirror for princes', an enchiridion for kingship, a theme begun in the Prologue.

This alleged departure from the main topic of the seven deadly sins has in the past elicited a harsh and sometimes unforgiving critical response. M.A. Manzalaoui, for example, writes 'to choose Book VII of the *Confessio Amantis* as one's topic is to load

¹⁹⁰ Patrick J. Gallacher, *Love, the Word, and Mercury: A Reading of John Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1975), p.1.

¹⁹¹ *MED* 'registre' n. (b). All instances of 'registre' in the *MED* very clearly allude to a textual practice whether the context is allegorical or not, such as in the 'registre of heaven'.

¹⁹² T. Matthew N. McCabe, *Gower's Vulgar Tongue: Ovid, Lay Religion, and English Poetry in the Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2011), p.113.

oneself with the handicap of a subject most critics have found dull.’¹⁹³ George G. Fox, in his seminal work on the sciences in Gower’s writings, finds this section dedicated to the *Trivium* and *Quadrivium* not only ‘dull’ but ‘exasperating’, ‘wearisome’, and assesses Gower’s scientific contributions as a ‘puerile performance’ of ‘limited scientific knowledge’ that simply parrots his sources without any real understanding of the content.¹⁹⁴ G.C. Macaulay, in his 1901 edition of the *Confessio*, brands the entirety of Book VII an artless ‘digression’ which is ‘absolutely irrelevant to the main subject’ and labels parts as ‘skippable’ to the casual reader. And, more recently, Kurt Olsson has remarked that Gower’s section on Rhetoric ‘is problematic for its very brevity’.¹⁹⁵ The very brevity of Gower’s section on ‘Rethorique’ certainly appears to suggest that Gower himself thought the subject superficial, inconsequential even. Yet, this section is, in fact, longer than the exposition on ‘Theologie’, ‘Physique’, and indeed all the other Liberal Arts except ‘Astronomie’ and is significantly important as it holds the status of being the first known treatment of the subject of rhetoric in the English language.¹⁹⁶ In this chapter I seek to show that Gower’s section on rhetoric is absolutely crucial to our understanding of his views of language, views that are central to our comprehension of Gower’s project as a whole. My core thesis that Gower views signs as inadequate to signify meaning and realities is grounded in this section and I contend that this is a central preoccupation of his throughout the *Confessio*. Through in-depth analysis, we can glean the true nature of Gower’s sign and I demonstrate, here, that Gower closely follows an Augustinian linguistic paradigm. I argue further that Gower’s ‘word’ is external, corporeal, physical and therefore fallen, temporal, and mutable.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹³ M.A. Manzalaoui, ‘Noght in the Registre of Venus’: Gower’s English Mirror for Princes, in *Medieval Studies for J.A.W. Bennet*, ed. P.L. Heyworth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp.159-183.

¹⁹⁴ George G. Fox, *The Mediaeval Sciences in the Works of John Gower* (New York: Haskell House, 1966).

¹⁹⁵ Kurt Olsson, *John Gower and the Structures of Conversion: A Reading of the Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), p.201.

¹⁹⁶ James J. Murphy, ‘John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* and the First Discussion of Rhetoric in the English Language’, *Philological Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 4 (1962), 408-409.

¹⁹⁷ See Georgiana Donavin, ‘Rhetorical Gower: Aristotelianism in the *Confessio Amantis*’ Treatment of ‘Rethorique’, in *John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts*, ed. Malte Urban (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp.155-156; Masayoshi Itô, *John Gower: Medieval Poet*, (Tokyo: Shinozaki Shorin, 1976); Götz Schmitz, *The Middel Weie: Stil-und Aufbauformen in John Gower’s Confessio Amantis, Studien zur englischen Literatur*, 11 (Bonn: 1974), 27-54; Helen Cooper, “‘Peised Evne in the Balance’: A Thematic And Rhetorical Topos in the *Confessio Amantis*”, *Mediaevalia* (1993), 113-139 (p.136); Matthew Irvin, ‘*In Propria Persona*’: Artifice, Politics, and Propriety in John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*, (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Duke University, 2009), p.74; Edward Weber, *John Gower: zur literarischen Form seiner Dichtungen* (Bad Homburg: At the author’s, 1966); George C. Macaulay, *Confessio Amantis*, Vol.1, p.522; George L. Hamilton, ‘Some Sources of the Seventh Book of Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*’, *Modern Philology*, Vol. 9, (1912), 323-346 (p.334).

GOWER'S FALLEN SIGNS

Gower commences his section on rhetoric, most unusually for such contemporaneous discussions of 'the arts of discourse', with an allusion to the provenance of language. He writes:

Above alle erthli creatures
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 thoght which is withinne
Mai schewe, what it wolde mene (CA, VII, 1507-1513)

Kim Zarins has, most recently, interpreted this opening passage as a description of the 'mythic origin' of rhetoric, a simple gift that 'comes ready-made', a recasting of the mystical and civilizing foundation narrative of eloquence propounded by Cicero¹⁹⁸ and reiterated by Quintilian¹⁹⁹ and Horace.²⁰⁰²⁰¹ Diane Watt, however, finds not only clear references to the Book of Genesis, in Genius' introductory account, but also 'resonances of St John's Gospel (1: 1-4)'.²⁰² Götz Schmitz, correspondingly, observes biblical overtones in this passage when he writes that 'there is a hint of the sublime style of the Book of Genesis when Gower comes to extol the importance of the word at the beginning of his chapter on rhetoric'.²⁰³ There is no doubt, in my mind, that 'The hihe makere of natures' (CA, VII, 1508) is a Christian God, not a mysterious mythological one, and that

¹⁹⁸ See Cicero, *De inventione*, <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cicero/inventione.shtml>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

¹⁹⁹ See Quintilian, *Institio oratoria*

<<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/quintilian/quintilian.institutio1.shtml>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

²⁰⁰ See Horace, *Ars poetica* <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/horace/arspoet.shtml>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

²⁰¹ Kim Zarins, 'Gower and rhetoric', in *The Routledge Research Companion to John Gower*, eds Ana Sáez-Hidalgo, Brian Gastle, and R.F. Yeager (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017).

²⁰² Diane Watt, 'Literary Genealogy, Virile Rhetoric, and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*', *Philological Quarterly*, 78, (1999), 389-415 (p.393). St John's Gospel which notably declares 'in principio erat Verbum et Verbum erat apud Deum et Deus erat Verbum.' [In the beginning was the Word: and the Word was with God: and the Word was God].

²⁰³ Götz Schmitz, 'Rhetoric and Fiction: Gower's Comments on Eloquence and Courtly Poetry', *Gower's Confessio Amantis: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Peter Nicholson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1991), pp.117-42, p.122.

Gower is referencing the Book of Genesis and the ‘authorized account’²⁰⁴ of the creation of language. By doing so, he signals a fundamental retreat from the world of ancient rhetoric which deified the orator and believed in the magical efficacy of his rhetorical configurations. While this outline of language is uncommon for a manual on rhetoric, it is, according to Edwin Craun, unsurprising for pastoral treatises that examine the sins of the tongue, and he remarks that ‘Genius begins treating rhetoric [...] exactly where pastoral treatises on deviant speech begin: with the origin and function of speech.’²⁰⁵ John Fyler concurs noting that virtually all medieval accounts of language begin with the story of Genesis but is also, as we shall see, always closely followed by the ‘word’s’ rapid participation in the Fall.²⁰⁶

By placing the ‘word’ at the very beginning of his section on rhetoric, Gower is privileging its importance. As with Augustine, ‘words are the most important kind of sign because all human achievement of culture and learning is dependent on the kind of communication that uses signifying sounds’.²⁰⁷ Götz Schmitz states that Gower levels the distinction between language and eloquence by speaking of the ‘word’,²⁰⁸ yet the primacy of place that Gower affords the ‘word’ in this passage is a strong indication of language’s elevation over eloquence, a specification in itself that all arts of discourse are subsequently subordinate to the verbal sign. Like Dante in *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, Gower declares that God invested man alone in Paradise with the power of speech.²⁰⁹ From this, we can determine that Gower is depicting human speech as outlined in Genesis 2:19 and not the divine *Verbum* of St. John. It is evident that Gower takes an Augustinian view of language and, as we have seen in Chapter One, Gower presents the ‘word’ as a sign - ‘word is tokne of that withinne’ (CA, VII, 1737). Augustine, in his *De doctrina Christiana*, if we further recall, writes of the given sign (*signum data*) thus:

²⁰⁴ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.3. Fyler remarks that there are in fact four languages at the beginning of Genesis – God’s language, Adam’s language, the language of his descendants, and the diverse languages after Babel.

²⁰⁵ Edwin D. Craun, *Lies, Slander, and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature: Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p.118.

²⁰⁶ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.3.

²⁰⁷ Cary, *Outward Signs*, p.76.

²⁰⁸ Götz Schmitz, ‘Rhetoric and Fiction’, p.127.

²⁰⁹ ‘nam eorum que sunt omnium soli homini datum est loqui, cum solum sibi necessarium fuerit’ [for among all creatures only man received the gift of speech since only man needed it.] I.ii trans. by Marianne Shapiro in *De Vulgari Eloquentia: Dante’s Book of Exile* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1990). All English text is taken from this edition. All Latin text is from <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/dante/mon1.shtml>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

Data vero signa sunt quae sibi quaeque viventia invicem dant ad demonstrandos quantum possunt motus animi sui, vel sensa aut intellect quaelibet. Nec ulla causa est nobis significandi, id est signi dandi, nisi ad depromendum et traiciendum in alterius animum id quod animo gerit is qui signum dat.

[Given signs, on the other hand, are those which living beings mutually exchange for the purpose of showing, as well as they can, the feelings of their minds, or their perceptions, or their thoughts. Nor is there any reason for giving a sign except the desire of drawing forth and conveying into another's mind what the giver of the sign has in his own mind.] (2.3)

The idea of a 'given' (*data*) sign, indicates an external environment of exchange which is re-enforced by the verb *demonstrandos* [demonstrating/showing]. In Augustine's definition of the *signum data* there is a clear movement from the internal mind (*animi*) or *intellect* outward into the world of signs, an outward world which words belong to.²¹⁰ Gower, as with Augustine and Dante, establishes that the function of the verbal sign is for outward communication. It participates, for all three writers, in an expressionist semiotics.²¹¹ As David Coley writes 'a divinely ordained gift, the speech that Genius celebrates was designed by God to externalize the thoughts of the human heart'.²¹² Gower refers to this speech as 'of his persone' (CA, VII, 1510). The Middle English noun 'persone', where the modern English 'person' is derived from, has the meaning of an 'individual'.²¹³ But its root is in the Latin 'persona' which holds a very specific meaning

²¹⁰ Following on from Augustine, in *De Vulgari Eloquentia* Dante deals exclusively with the verbal sign and specifies it as transferable from the interior mind to the exterior domain of the senses in order to be interpreted:

'Oportuit ergo genus humanum ad comunicandum inter se conceptiones suas aliquod rationale signum et sensuale habere; quia, cum de ratione accipere habeat et in rationem portare, rationale esse oportuit; cumque de una ratione in aliam nichil deferri possit nisi per medium sensuale, sensuale esse oportuit.'
(1.7)

[Therefore, in order to communicate their mental conceptions to one another, men had to have some kind of rational and sensory sign. This sign had to be rational because it would both arise from and lead to reason. And since nothing can be transferred from one reasoning mind to another except by sensory means, it had to be sensory].

²¹¹ See Cary, *Outward Signs* for more on the term 'expressionist semiotics'.

²¹² David K. Coley, *The Wheel of Language: Representing Speech in Middle English Poetry 1377-1422* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press 2012), p.160.

²¹³ *MED* 'persoun' n, 1(a).

for Augustine. He, firstly, uses it to distinguish, in *De Trinitate* 7.7, the three individual ‘persons’ of the divine Trinity and, secondly, to convey the idea that a human being consists of both *anima* (soul) and *corpus* (body) (*De Trinitate* 15.11). If we view Gower’s phrase through an Augustinian lens, the particular choice of the word ‘persone’ describes not just an abstract individual but, in so doing, draws attention to the existence of the two separate ontological domains of soul and body, two realms that must be unified to access truth.²¹⁴

Emphasis is placed on the external nature of the ‘word’ by offsetting it against the ‘hertes thoght that is withinne’ (CA, VII, 1512). Gower invokes the interior thrice in this sentence. Firstly, with reference to the ‘herte’ which is part of the ontological world of the interior. In Middle English it can mean both mind and soul.²¹⁵ Augustine did not distinguish between the two terms, finding that both belonged to the domain of the intelligible. The terms ‘heart’, ‘mind’, ‘soul’, and ‘strength’ only appear together in the New Testament in Matthew 22:37, Mark 12:30, and Luke 10:27. And ‘the original Old Testament formulation of Deuteronomy 6:5 [Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength] does not include ‘mind’, because the ancient Hebrew word for “mind” is “heart”’.²¹⁶ Secondly, Gower invokes the interior through his phrase the ‘hertes thoght’ which is the innermost part of thought which by its very nature is internal in the mind. And lastly, Gower tells us that it all, heart and thought, resides internally (‘withinne’). This opposition between interior and exterior, soul and body, is further revealed through Gower’s choice of the word ‘schewe’ (CA, VII, 1513). ‘Schewe’, as a verb, has a range of different but comparable meanings in Middle English denoting something made visible²¹⁷, something exhibited in public²¹⁸, to give external appearance to,²¹⁹ and to teach²²⁰. All these aspects of ‘schewe’, inarguably, indicate an exteriority and an external form of communication which fully correlates to Augustine’s use of *demonstrandus* in his definition of the sign. Not only

²¹⁴ Irvin argues that Gower’s use of ‘persone’ is from the legal figure of the ‘persona’, which was distinct from ‘things’, and his knowledge of such legal terminology was probably because he was a lawyer. He writes that the ‘division of law into *res*, *persones*, and *actiones* is found in the *Inst.* I.iii. and was significantly developed through Azo of Bologna’s *Summa of Justinian’s Institutes*’, *Poetic Voices of John Gower*, p.14.

²¹⁵ *MED* ‘herte’ n.

²¹⁶ Cary, *Outward Signs*, p.289, note 20.

²¹⁷ *MED* ‘schewe’ v., 2 (a).

²¹⁸ *MED* ‘schewe’ v., 4 (a).

²¹⁹ *MED* ‘schewe’ v., 3 (a).

²²⁰ *MED* ‘schewe’ v., 8 (a).

that, but the semantic connection of ‘schewe’ to teaching also recalls Augustine’s declaration in *De magistro* that ‘nihil nos locutione, nisi ut doceamus appetere’ [when we speak we want nothing other than to teach] (I.1). Thus Genius finds the purpose of language to be the voluntary transformation of the interior into the exterior, thought into a verbal sign, concept into word for the purpose of showing/teaching/communicating meaning (‘what it wolde mene’ CA, VII, 1513). Gower’s understanding of the function of the verbal sign as an external expression (signifier) of the internal concept (signified) is so close to Augustine’s that I would argue that Gower must have had access to a copy of, or commentary on, *De civitate Dei* while writing the *Confessio*.²²¹

The verbal sign is, for Gower, also uniquely human ‘And that is noghwhere elles sene / Of kinde with non other beste’ (CA, VII, 1514-1515). Importantly, he highlights that the ultimate telos, indeed, the endgame of language is truth:

The word to man hath gove alone,
 So that the speech of his persone,
 [...] The hertes thoght which is withinne
 Mai schewe, what it wolde mene;
 [...]
 So scholde he be the more honeste,
 To whom God gaf so gret a gifte (CA, VII, 1509-1517)

The word ‘honeste’ in its adjectival form, signifies people that are virtuous, upright, and good²²² as well as actions, thoughts, and words that are morally pure or chaste.²²³ But when placed entirely in the context of speech and language, as Gower uses the word here, it more commonly and therefore more appropriately means truthfulness.²²⁴ In this Edenic setting, the original goal of language was to transform the internal thought into a verbal

²²¹ For a tentative list of possible manuscripts, including Augustinian, that may have been held in St. Mary Overy’s Priory in Gower’s time see Jean-Pascal Pouzet, ‘Southwark Gower: Augustinian Agencies in Gower’s Manuscripts and Texts – Some Prolegomena’ in *John Gower Trilingual Poet: Language, Translation, and Tradition*, eds Elisabeth Dutton, John Hines, and R.F. Yeager (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2010), pp.11-25.

²²² *MED* ‘honeste’ adj. 4 (a).

²²³ *MED* ‘honeste’ adj. 4 (b).

²²⁴ *MED* ‘honeste’ adj. 5.

sign to allow²²⁵ for a truthful and transparent form of communication between the first humans. Similar to Augustine in his *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, Gower avers that, in the pre-lapsarian world, what one soul wanted to teach another soul was truth. The signified was to correlate perfectly to the signifier to garner true signification. This is the reason God gave humans ‘the word’ and not, as Gower warns next, for man to abuse it by adapting it to his own nefarious purposes: ‘And loke wel that he ne schifte / Hise wordes to no wicked us’ (CA, VII, 1518-1519). The adjective ‘wicked’, used here, denotes an action or thought that is iniquitous or sinful.²²⁶ Coming immediately after the Edenic *locus* of the word, this direct allusion to sinful speech explicitly evokes the Fall from Paradise and thus brings to the fore the idea of post-lapsarian language. ‘Wicked’ words, additionally, link back to Gower’s phrase ‘oro malus’ [wicked speech] taken from the Latin proverbial riddle at the very beginning of the *Confessio* (CA, Prologue, i). Gower, thus foregrounds fallen language from the onset and includes the entire poem in its potential participation. We find a more concrete link through Gower’s specific choice of the word ‘wicke’ in his Middle English re-telling of this proverb in Book III:

‘Ha wicke tunge, wo thee be!’
 For men sein that the harde bon,
 Although himselven have non,
 A tunge brekth it al to pieces. (CA, III, 462-5)

Genius, in Book II, additionally requests that Amans ‘Bewar and lef thi wicke speche / Wherof hath fallen ofte wreche’ (CA, II, 571-2). The close proximity of ‘wicke speche’, which has been determined to mean sinful speech, and ‘fallen’ in this couplet undoubtedly alludes to the Fall of man and language, thereby implicating Amans himself, via Genius’ accusation, in such use of language.

The verb ‘schifte’ in line 1518 denotes a turning away from, a manipulation or alteration of something.²²⁷ In this sense Gower is referencing a movement away from the previously stated telos of truth in language towards a ‘wicked us’ that is a sinful or iniquitous purpose. Gower is, therefore, suggesting an abandonment of truth entirely

²²⁵ MED ‘shulen’ v. (1) 23 (b).

²²⁶ MED ‘wikked’ adj.; see also ‘wikke’ adj.

²²⁷ MED ‘schiften’ v. 2.

reminiscent of Augustine's description of the Fall of Adam and Eve in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*. 'Schifte' also has the more popular definition in Middle English of division and separation.²²⁸ Gower, consequently, instils the idea of division into the fall of language and the fall away from truth when man begins to abuse and manipulate words to suit his own pernicious needs. This recalls the division and dispersal of language at Babylon and, for Gower, such 'divisioun' and loss of meaning in language leads not just to linguistic chaos but also moral confusion. He writes in the Prologue:

That Nembrot such emprise nom,
Whan he the Tour of Babel on heihte
Let make, as he that wolde feihte
Agein the hihe Goddes myht,
Wherof divided anon ryht
Was the langage in such entente
Ther wiste non what other mente,
So that thei myhten noght procede
And thus it stant of every dede
Wher senne takth the cause on honde (CA, Prologue, 1018-1027)

Nimrod and the Tower of Babel in Genesis 11 represented, in the Middle Ages, a second 'Fall', a later crisis of the 'word' that offered a potent paradigm for division and alienation not only in language but the alienation of humans into a 'regio disimilitudinis' [region of unlikeness]²²⁹ as well.²³⁰ It was a continuation of the process of estrangement from grace, the divine banishment from Eden. As John Fyler notes 'Gower uses the confusion of tongues as the culminating example of and metonymy for sinful division in the declining world'.²³¹ For Gower, sin 'Which ferst began in Paradis' (CA, Prologue, 1005) is 'moder of divisioun' (CA, Prologue, 1030). He tells us that 'Division aboven alle / Is thing which makth the world to falle' (CA, Prologue, 971-2). Sin and division are of the same species for Gower, seemingly inextricable from each other as are worldly and human decay. The

²²⁸ *MED* 'schiften' v. 1(a).

²²⁹ St Augustine, *Confessiones*, 7.10. Translation my own.

²³⁰ John Fyler, 'Language Barriers', *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 112, No. 3 (2015), 415 -452 (p.415). Eric Jager argues differently, that only the 'Fall' made a significant impact on medieval authors, writing that Babel did not 'emerge as a major literary topos until after the Renaissance', *The Tempter's Voice*, p.1.

²³¹ Fyler, 'Language Barriers', p.420.

macrocosmic division is microcosmically reflected in the diverse complexions of man: ‘Of cold, of hot, of moist, of drye, / He mot be verray kynde dye, / For the contrarire is his astat / Stant evermor in such debat’ (CA, Prologue, 977-980). Whether it is the division of body and soul or the multiplication and dispersal of languages at Babel, the division of the ages of the world; the diverse empires throughout history or the division of the bodily humours; they are all a direct result of the Fall of Adam and Eve. So when Genius remarks ‘And loke wel that he ne schifte / Hise wordes to no wicked us’ (CA, VII, 1518-1519) he adumbrates these ideas of division and sin and ultimately the Fall. It is in this context, immediately following Gower’s account of the creation and subsequent fall of language, that he leads us to the invention or ‘science’ of ‘Rethorique’ (CA, VII, 1523).

Yet, before the formal mention of ‘Rethorique’ Genius remarks that ‘For word the techer of vertus / is cleped in Philosophie’ (CA, VII, 1520-21). These lines have been dismissed as mere filler and, thus, have garnered very little critical attention. Genius’ irregular syntax appears to only confuse things, so much so, that in Russell Peck’s edition of the *Confessio* he goes to the trouble of specifically translating these two lines into Modern English in an effort to untangle their difficult meaning.²³² Genius’ use of anastrophe and hyperbaton, where he changes the syntactically correct order of subject, verb, object, profoundly complicates this couplet. These are the same rhetorical figures of speech, however, that Nature complains that man, deluded by Orpheus’ lyre, has unnaturally turned to in Alain of Lille’s *De Planctu Naturae*. In this text, which has long been seen as a source for Gower, the author calls the users of such rhetorical tropes and figures false sophists and the employment of them vices. Alain connects corrupted rhetoric, such as this, to that of corrupted love (homosexuality, transsexuality, adultery, and lechery).²³³ While these particular rhetorical devices serve to emphasise the sentence

²³² Peck, *Confessio Amantis*, Vol. 3, p.299.

²³³ ‘Solus homo, meae modulationis citharamaspernat, sub delirantis Orphei lira delirat: humanum namque genus a sua generositate degenerans, in constructione generum barbarizans, venereas regulas invertendonimis irregulari utitur metaplasmo. Sic homo, Venere Tiresiatus anomala, directam praedicationem per compositionem inordinate convertit. A Veneris ergo orthographia deviando recedens sophistta falsigraphus invenitur. Consequentem etiam Dionaeae artis analogiam devitans, in anastrophen vitiosam degenerat. Dumque in tali constructione me destruit, in sua synaeresi mei themesim machinatur.’ (8.8.)

[Man alone, scorning the music of my harmonious governance, is deluded by the lyre of a delirious Orpheus. For the human race, fallen away from its noble origin, is barbarous in its construction of gender, and practices a most irregular metaplasms that inverts the rules of Venus. Thus a male, Tiresias - like in his strange practice of love, transforms direct predication into composition of an irregular kind. Abandoning the orthography of Venus in his truancy, he shows himself a writer of sophistic falsehood.

they are employed in, they further create a division in tone between it and the previous line which reads ‘His wordes to no wicked us’ (CA, VII, 1519). As I have argued earlier, this line connotes fallen speech and thus, we see Gower cleverly introducing these complex rhetorical devices, in this passage, as a vivid illustration, through Genius’ own speech patterns, of fallen and corrupt language. Diane Watt writes that ‘disrupted syntax can [...] signal sexual or moral confusion’²³⁴ and Gower’s use of rhetoric at this point is intentional, designed to confuse, to recall not only the ‘confusio’ of Babel but also to fully demonstrate, by example, the inherent problems of rhetoric and fallen language whose meaning, as Peck has shown, still remains difficult to parse.

One of the effects of Genius’ rhetoric in this couplet is to underscore and centralise the focus on the core concepts of ‘word’, ‘teacher’, and ‘vertus’ in the context of philosophy. While the construction of the sentence itself is syntactically disruptive, the content is equally fraught with difficulty. In philosophy the idea that virtue can be taught at all was the source of ardent debate and interrogation. The Sophists claimed to be teachers of virtue (Greek ‘arete’) but would only teach those who could pay which directly led to the later negative and deceptive connotation associated with the term ‘sophistry’. Socrates, on the other hand, took a more aporetic stance and the question was much discussed in the anonymous *Dissoi Logoi* (ch. 6) as well as by various different philosophers such as Antisthenes, Aristippos, Xenophon, Isocrates, Xenocrates, to name but a few. Plato notably explores the question in several of his dialogues such as *Protagoras*, *Euthydemos*, *Phaidros*, *Symposion* and, in particular, in *Meno*²³⁵. Plato’s *Meno* opens with a torrent of curious questions put to Socrates by the young eponymous student: ‘Can you tell me, Socrates, whether virtue (arete) is acquired by teaching or by practice; or if neither by teaching nor practice, then whether it comes to man by nature, or in what other way?’²³⁶ Predictably, Socrates turns the questions back on the student in

Evading the natural, analogous path of the Dionean art, he falls into the vice of anastrophe. He works my destruction by constructions, and his combinations threaten to divide me.] Alain de Lille, *Literary Works*, ed. and trans. Winthrop Wetherbee (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013). I have followed the numbering of Metrum and Prosa from this edition.

²³⁴ Diane Watt, *Moral Gower: Language, Sex and Politics*, (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), p.32.

²³⁵ Anselm W. Müller,

<http://www.philosophy.ox.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/20312/meuller.pdf>, University of Trier, n.p., [accessed September 29th 2017]. While a large portion of Plato’s thought was mined from examining St Augustine’s works in the Middle Ages, a Latin translation of the *Meno* was produced by Henricus Aristippus in the 1150s. See Dermot Moran, ‘Medieval Platonism’, in *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. Edward Craig, Vol. 7 (London: Routledge, 1998), pp.431-439.

²³⁶ Plato, *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, 4. Vols, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1871).

an attempt to tease out the problem. His rejoinder to Meno is that he does not know what the definition of virtue is and it is unlikely that he has met anyone who actually can define it despite claiming to teach it. Socrates continues to say that if one assumes that virtue is a form of knowledge then it ought to be teachable (Meno 86-89). However, real knowledge, even in mathematics, is not communicated by a teacher, Socrates clarifies, but is something you find internally in yourself when correctly prompted (Meno 80-85). It is possible that correct opinion is imparted but, unlike real knowledge, correct opinion is unstable and therefore cannot constitute virtue (Meno 97-98). Moreover, it would seem that, if virtue could be taught, there would be people who could effectively teach it but, according to Socrates, there aren't, and this, he thinks, calls into question even the original assumption that virtue is knowledge (Meno 97-98) thus concluding that virtue cannot in fact be taught. Aristotle, of whom Genius claims authority, in his *Nicomachean Ethics* correspondingly declares that virtue cannot be taught in the classroom or through argument but that 'moral virtue' comes about in early childhood only through practice and habit. As pointed out in Chapter One, Augustine in *De magistro*, absorbing closely these classical philosophies, avers that because signs cannot signify realities accurately, it becomes impossible to teach effectively using signs and as all teaching requires signs therefore, paradoxically, nothing is taught with signs. Instead, Augustine declares, like Plato, that true knowledge is understood internally and not through the external word. In Augustine's case, it is through the interior teacher of Christ. This loaded couplet, then, weighed down by such a recognizable philosophical debate must have been immediately apparent to Gower's sophisticated and educated audience. Gower the poet, through clever allusions to Plato and Augustine, denies the ability of the fallen external sign to teach virtue and morality and Genius' unwitting remark, ironically then, serves only to subvert his whole doctrinal endeavour, aligning him with the Sophists and, in turn, destabilising his own teaching content, medium, and assumed authority.

In the following lines, Gower finally begins his explication on rhetoric. As Macaulay has noted, Gower's main source for this section and indeed all of Book VII is Brunetto Latini's *Li Livres dou Trésor*.²³⁷ Brunetto divides his *Trésor*, similarly to Gower, into three parts but this is where the two authors diverge. Brunetto's tripartite schema is that of Theory, Practice, and Logic, whereas Gower's 'thre pointz in principal'

²³⁷ G.C. Macaulay, *The Complete Works of John Gower*, Vol. 3 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), pp.521-522.

(CA, VII, 29) is ‘Theorique’, ‘Rethorique’, and ‘Practique’. Gower uniquely replaces Brunetto’s logic with rhetoric and this segment comes to exist, as David Coley remarks, ‘at the intersection of the immutable laws of God on the one hand (theology, physics, mathematics, creation, and astronomy) and the slippery exercise of human virtue on the other (truth, largess, justice, pity, and chastity).’²³⁸ Genius tells us that:

[...] Rethorique the science
Appropred to the reverence
Of wordes that ben reasonable
And for this art schal be vailable
With goodli wordes for to like,
It hath Gramaire, it hath Logique,
That serven bothe unto the speche. (CA, VII, 1523-1529)

Rhetoric, Genius tells us, is the art dedicated to honouring words. The noun ‘reverence’²³⁹ suggests a deep veneration, bordering on religious worship which moves this description into the realm of idolatry. Gower frequently uses ‘reverence’ to mean both pagan and Christian religious devotion throughout the *Confessio*.²⁴⁰ And he, in fact, uses this exact noun in his section on ‘Idol Worship’ in Book V to describe the divine worship of the statue made in honour of the deceased King of the Greeks, Apis:

In whom thurgh long continuance
Of misbelieve a gret creance
Thei hadden, and the *reverence*
Of sacrifice and of encence
To him thei made (CA, V, 1565-69)

St Paul, in his letter to the Romans (Romans 1:18-27), explicitly links the making and adulation of signs to sexual perversion and in, particular, sodomy.²⁴¹ The formation of

²³⁸ Coley, *The Wheel of Language*: p.157.

²³⁹ *MED* ‘reverence’ n, 1 (a) (b).

²⁴⁰ See ‘reverence’ in Pickles, *Concordance*, p.503.

²⁴¹ See in particular ‘et mutaverunt gloriam incorruptibilis Dei in similitudinem imaginis corruptibilis hominis et volucrum et quadrupedum et serpentium’ (Romans 1:23) [And they changed the glory of the incorruptible God into the likeness of the image of a corruptible man and of birds, and of fourfooted beasts and of creeping things]. And ‘propterea tradidit illos Deus in passiones ignominiae nam feminae

signs and engagement in sexual practices are both direct consequences of the Fall and, from this biblical passage, the equation between idolatry, including idolatry of the letter, and sexual perversion, as Eugene Vance has examined, became a subtle, yet effective, force in medieval poetics.²⁴² As we have already seen, Alain of Lille, in his *De Planctu Naturae*, conflates the perversion of all branches of the *trivium* with sexual perversion including sodomy and Dante places the rhetorician Brunetto Latini, Gower's direct source for this section, amongst the Sodomites in the seventh circle of hell in Canto XV of *Inferno*. As Diane Watt writes, 'even if, after possibly reading about the fate of Brunetto Latini in Dante's *Commedia*, Gower did not make the connection between rhetoric, moral degeneracy, and sodomy, Alain's concerns about the dangerous influence of corrupt language are as pertinent as Latini's *Trésor* to Gower's discussion of rhetoric.'²⁴³ And while it is uncertain whether Gower read Dante's *Commedia*, 'nonetheless, we cannot isolate the text from its literary and cultural contexts, and such connections did exist.'²⁴⁴ So, although Gower does not explicitly condemn rhetoric as sodomitical or sexually perverse, his allusion to idolatry of the letter through the noun 'reverence' certainly allows his readers to make those connections through their own knowledge of St Paul's letter, Alain's *De Planctu Naturae*, and/or Dante's *Commedia*. This link between rhetoric and moral degeneracy consisting of social, linguistic, and sexual decay is far from the mythological civilising forces of Cicero, Quintilian, and Horace and is, instead, another extension of humanity's vast distance from God that began in the Garden of Eden. Furthermore, the strong link between rhetoric and idolatry, for Gower, via the noun 'reverence' demonstrates his understanding of the powerlessness of external things. Both idols and words, as external objects, fail to signify truth. Statues, paintings, images, icons, and words must not be worshipped as if they, themselves, are divinely powerful to confer grace. These temporal items are but mere simulations, part of the corporeal world. This is the lesson of God's punishment of the idolators in St Paul's

eorum inmutaverunt naturalem usum in eum usum qui est contra naturam similiter autem et masculi relicto naturali usu feminae exarserunt in desideriiis suis in invicem masculi in masculos turpitudinem operantes et mercedem quam oportuit erroris sui in semet ipsis recipients' (Romans 1:26-27) [For this cause, God delivered them up to shameful affections. For their women have changed the natural use into that use which is against nature. And, in like manner, the men also, leaving the natural use of the women, have burned in their lusts, one towards another: men with men, working that which is filthy and receiving in themselves the recompense which was due to their error].

²⁴² Vance, *Merveulous Signals*, pp.230-255.

²⁴³ Watt, *Amoral Gower*, p.52.

²⁴⁴ Watt, *Amoral Gower*, p.54.

letter. Gower makes this explicit when he writes of idolatry ‘And yit the foles to hem knele, / Which is here oghne handes werk’ (CA, V, 1504-1505).

The verb ‘appropred’ which means dedicated or reserved for²⁴⁵ also denotes through its Old French etymology of ‘appropriier’²⁴⁶, something that is the property of.²⁴⁷ In this way, Gower implies that rhetoric is in thrall to the ‘word’. Nonetheless, it is evident that both maintain that rhetoric is reliant on the verbal sign, and the primacy of place Gower gives the ‘word’ at the beginning of this section on rhetoric, as I argued earlier, supports this. Gower makes another original and unprecedented move, here, when he subjugates the other two parts of the *trivium*, grammar and logic, to rhetoric. Jonathan M. Newman rightly points out that this alteration, like Gower’s overall treatment of logic has been entirely overlooked by most studies of the *Confessio Amantis* and if discussed at all, only glancingly.²⁴⁸ Gower firstly writes of ‘Gramaire’ that it ‘ferste hath for to teche / To speke upon congruité’ (CA, VII, 1530-1531); that it is entirely dependent on communal linguistic agreement or convention. This reliance on convention clearly makes ‘Gramaire’ a product of the fall and a sign of the decay of the ‘word’, a complete failure of its function as outward sign of inner unity. The consequence of the Fall and Babel was the absence of true linguistic meaning, further complicated by the dispersal of peoples and languages all over the world. Linguistic convention is a direct result of this sin. Jesse M. Gellrich posits that medieval thought saw the necessity of the ‘ferste rule of scole’ the *Ars grammatica* and *Institutiones grammaticales* after the Fall and the Tower of Babel as a way of desperately stabilising semantics amidst the ‘babbling chaos of tongues’ and as an attempt to shore up ‘meaning against the ruin of misreading’.²⁴⁹ In Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly* he writes of the world’s first Golden Age as a time that had no need for grammar, logic or rhetoric²⁵⁰ and John Wycliffe similarly notes in his *Tractus de Statu Innocencie* that humans in Paradise, who spoke the mother tongue of Hebrew, as well as beasts would have had *voces naturales*. In that state there was no necessity for grammar, dialectic, or rhetoric, ‘when truth of locution without duplicity and propriety without ugliness’ [veritas

²⁴⁵ MED ‘appropred’ v. 2 (a).

²⁴⁶ AND ‘appropriier’, v.

²⁴⁷ MED ‘appropren’ v. 1 (a).

²⁴⁸ Jonathan M. Newman, ‘The Rhetoric of Logic in John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*’, *Medievalia et Humanistica*, No. 38 (2012), 37-58 (p.38).

²⁴⁹ Jesse M. Gellrich, *The Idea of the Book in the Middle Ages: Language, Theory, Mythology, and Fiction* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1985), pp. 96-99.

²⁵⁰ Desiderius Erasmus, *In Praise of Folly*, trans. John Wilson, ed. Helen Mary Allen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1913).

locucionis sine duplicitate et decencia sine difformitate] would have been naturally congenial to innocent human beings'.²⁵¹

Gower treats the art of logic in a more protracted manner than 'Gramaire', affording it nine lines in total. Genius tells Amans that:

Logique hath eke in his degré
Betwen the trouthe and the falshode
The pleine wordes for to schode,
So that nothing schal go beside,
That he the riht ne schal decide,
Wherof full many a gret debat
Reformed is to good astat,
And pes sustiened up alofte
With esy wordes and with softe,
Wher strengthe sholde let it falle (CA, VII, 1532-1541)

James Jerome Murphy explains that the discipline of Logic was understood as the science of verifying knowledge through reason.²⁵² Brunetto, in his *Trésor*, turns his discussion of logic into an exposition of rhetoric. Of logic he writes:

La seconde est dyaletike, ki nous ensegne prover nos dis et nos paroles, par tele raison et par teus argumens ki donent foi as paroles ke nous avons dites, si k'eles samblent voires et provables a estre voires. (I. IV. 8)²⁵³

[The second [part of Practice] is dialectic, which teaches us to prove our statements and our words by reason and by arguments which lend

²⁵¹ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.215.

²⁵² James Jerome Murphy, *Rhetoric in the Middle Ages*, p.92.

²⁵³ Brunetto Latini, *Li livres dou trésor de Brunetto Latini*, ed. Francis J. Carmody (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1948). All French text comes from this edition unless stated otherwise.

credence to the words we have said, so that they appear true and probable.]²⁵⁴

As Jonathan Newman points out, this definition is plainly given to persuasion rather than verification²⁵⁵ focusing on merely the semblance of truth rather than the thing itself. This connection to persuasion and rhetoric becomes even more obvious when Brunetto describes the third part of logic thus:

La tierce science de logike est sophistique, ki ensegne prover ke les paroles ke l'en dist soient veraies; mais ce prueve il par mal engin et par fausses raisons et par sophismes, c'est par argument ki ont samblance et coverte de verité, mais n'i a cose se fause non. (I. V. 4)

[The third discipline of logic is sophistic, which teaches us to prove that words we have said are true, but this we prove through bad tricks and false reasons and by sophisms, that is, by arguments which have the appearance and outward cover of truth but contain only falsehood.]

The allusions to appearance, covering of truth, and illusion in these quotes very much link Brunetto's logic to rhetoric. By making sophistry a part of logic there seems to be no discernible difference between it and rhetoric. Genius picks up on these close connections, in Brunetto's descriptions, between rhetoric and logic even declaring logic's function in characteristically rhetorical terms, as 'pes sustiened up alofte / With esy wordes and with softé' (CA, VII, 1539-40). Though purporting to be 'betwen the trouthe and the falshode / The pleine wordes for to schode' (CA, VII, 1533-34), that logic can distinguish between true and false statements, Newman argues that Genius, by subordinating logic to rhetoric, essentially makes logic a subspecies, subset, or

²⁵⁴ Brunetto Latini, *The Book of the Treasure*, trans Paul Barette and Spurgeon Baldwin (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1993). All English text comes from this edition unless stated otherwise.

²⁵⁵ Newman, 'The Rhetoric of Logic', p.43.

specialized variety of rhetoric.²⁵⁶ By making logic a branch of rhetoric, Gower links it to false sophistry, the manipulation of language, the ‘dressing up’ of and, indeed, opposition to truth that we shall see the poet readily associate with the arts of discourse. Indeed, it becomes the very opposite of what it claims to be. Newman writes further that Logic for Gower is:

more susceptible to abuse than rhetoric, for while the dangers and limitations of rhetoric are widely acknowledged, logic is falsely regarded as being a sound basis for making verifiable claims on account of its freedom from contingency and partisan interest. It is more dangerous than rhetoric precisely because its authority outstrips its capacity. The plenitude of significance in words makes “double speche” (7.1736) - language with double meanings - difficult to avoid. The art of logic manifests a desire to achieve an arrangement or understanding of language that is self-validating, transparent, and full in the sense of fully available to the interpreter. Yet the analytical techniques offered by logic to achieve this full transparency consist of reductions, simplifications, and distinctions that disrupt fullness.²⁵⁷

But even more importantly for my argument, by making logic subservient to rhetoric, Gower ultimately subordinates it to the ‘word’ itself, a status shared with rhetoric. But the ‘word’, as we have seen, has been corrupted by the Fall resulting in division, dispersal, confusion, and ambiguity. The very ‘science’ that is meant to be a failsafe way to discern truth from falsehood, is itself a participant in the ineluctable corruption of language and, consequently, can only increase linguistic chaos not diminish it. In this section, Gower consciously and masterfully draws attention to the instability and abstruseness of the post-lapsarian ‘word’ to further illustrate the point that logic is not only chained to but also made ineffectual by the corrupted verbal sign. This is evident, in particular, in the line that defines the function of logic: ‘The pleine wordes for to schode’ (CA, VII, 1534). ‘Pleine’ has been taken to mean clear and unambiguous commensurate with the modern

²⁵⁶ Newman, ‘The Rhetoric of Logic’, p.45.

²⁵⁷ Newman, ‘The Rhetoric of Logic’, p.46.

word ‘plain’²⁵⁸ but ‘a subtle irony lurks here in this ostensibly simple definition – the very word that touts simplicity is itself ambiguous.’²⁵⁹ The *MED* claims that it is difficult to distinguish Middle English ‘plain(e)’ adj. from ‘plein(e)’ adj.²⁶⁰ with the latter adjective coming from Old French legal terminology meaning ‘whole’, ‘complete’, ‘plenary’.²⁶¹ The verb ‘shode’ equally finds itself with multiple meanings which affect our reading and understanding of the sentence. ‘Schode’, according to Russell Peck, signifies ‘declared’ which aligns it with a form of the verb ‘scheuen’²⁶² but, as Newman argues, it can also be related to a form of the verb ‘scheden’ which denotes a ‘division’, ‘separation’, ‘schism’ and, in fact, is more probably Gower’s intended meaning.²⁶³ Division, of course, a favourite theme of Gower’s as we have seen, brings to the fore the idea of linguistic and moral decay at the Tower of Babel and, indeed, a direct allusion to the Fall and Babel can be found through this verb in Trevisa’s translation of Ranulph Higden’s *Polychronicon* when he describes the linguistic division brought about by the Tower of Babel and, in so doing, equates the city’s name etymologically with the verb ‘scheden’ ‘þat place is i-cleped Babel, þat is to menyng *schedyng*; for þere at God Almyzte his heste þe longages and tonges of þe bulders were i-schad and to schift’ (2.6). In this quotation, Trevisa relates Babel metonymically to division (*schedyng*) and uses a form of the same verb to describe how the tongues and languages of the builders of the Tower became separated (*i-schad*) and further divided (*schift*). And ‘schift’ is the very same verb, if we recall, that Gower uses to denote a turning away and separation from the linguistic purity in the Garden of Eden towards its sinful abuse ‘and lok wel that he ne schifte / Hise wordes to no wicked us’ (CA, VII, 1518-19).

By subordinating grammar and logic to rhetoric and making them, instead, its servants, Gower is yoking both the Greek and Latin languages, which are the progenitors and utilizers of both arts of discourse, to the unstable, corrupt, and ambiguous post-lapsarian verbal sign. These languages and their artificial arts of rhetoric, grammar, and logic become complicit in the manipulation of the ‘word’ and the covering of truth. Genius tells us ‘For whan the word to the conceipte / Descordeth in so double a wise, / Such Rethorique is to despise (CA, VII, 1554-1556). When the concept does not signify

²⁵⁸ *MED* ‘plain’ adj. (3), (4a), (4b).

²⁵⁹ Newman, ‘The Rhetoric of Logic’, p.43.

²⁶⁰ See *MED* entry ‘plain’ adj.

²⁶¹ *MED* ‘pleine’ adj. (1).

²⁶² *MED* ‘sheuen’ v (9).

²⁶³ *MED* ‘sheden’ v (1); ‘shede’ n.

the word, the inner thought is not adequately or honestly represented by the external word, then it is a type of rhetoric to be rejected. But with the fall from Paradise, this perfect unity of signification between signified and signifier is completely lost. Indeed, Gower contrasts his fourteenth-century contemporary world with a lost Edenic past in exactly these linguistic terms. He writes of a 'tyme passed' (CA, Prologue, 94) when 'The word was lich to the conceite / Withoute semblant of deceite' (CA, Prologue, 113-14). Since there can be no concord between 'word' and 'conceipte', then all diverse languages and their subsequent arts of discourse are in the end 'rethorique to despise'. For Gower, all speech is sophistry.

The manipulation of language, deception and rhetoric is exemplified in the subsequent lines, with Genius' introduction of Ulysses:

For of Uluxes thus I rede,
As in the bok of Troie is founde,
His eloquence and his facounde
Of goodly wordes whiche he tolde.
Hath mad that Anthenor him solde
The toun, which he with tresoun wan. (CA, VII, 1558-63)

Genius alludes to the textual sign through his reference to his reading of the Book of Troy but also that of fiction, particularly Virgilian poetic fiction. Troy, of course, also brings us right back to the beginning of the *Confessio* in the Prologue when Gower refers to England as the 'Isle of Brutus' and London as 'Newe Troy'. Here, Ulysses uses the verbal sign, or abuses such through 'eloquence and facounde', to persuade Antenor to 'sell' the town of Troy in an act of mercantile duplicity. Ulysses employs 'goodly wordes' to convince Antenor to betray his city and fellow citizens by opening the gates of Troy to the Greeks precipitating its utter destruction. Thus, for Gower, and Genius, Troy is first lost through a singular act of speech. Furthermore, Gower tells us Ulysses and the Greeks won the town of Troy with 'treasoun'. Richard Firth Green writes that 'treason' is a key-

word in the fourteenth century and is the principal antonym of 'truth'.²⁶⁴ Thus 'goodly wordes' and 'treasoun' are on par with each other in this instance. This inevitably draws parallels with the Fall of Paradise and Satan's seductive eloquence in the Garden of Eden. Eugene Vance remarks that Troy has fallen heir to all the violence of human nature as that violence is communicated through and incited by speech - and more specifically through epic language itself.²⁶⁵

This is not the first reference Gower makes to Ulysses. By the time his name appears in this section, Ulysses has already been mentioned five times in the *Confessio*. His reputation precedes him and in almost all cases Gower highlights Ulysses' mendacity. In Book IV in 'The Tale of Nauplius and Ulysses', King Nauplius attempts to encourage Ulysses to fight at Troy, but he would rather stay in bed with his wife. In an effort to see how 'he sholde hem best beguile' (CA, IV, 1826), Ulysses devises a plan to 'feigneth to be wod' (CA, IV, 1833). But Nauplius suspects that this is a 'slehte that he feigneth' and tellingly accuses Ulysses of being 'in a querele of trowthe' (CA, VI, 1860-1864). In Book V, Ulysses is described as 'he which hath facoude' in 'The Tale of Achilles and Deidamia' in Gower's section on Perjury (CA, V, 3126) and in Book VI he is further linked to the linguistic arts: He was a gret rhetorien / He was a gret magician; / Of Tullius the rethorique, / Of King Zorastes the magique (CA, VI, 1399-1402). Genius cleverly rhymes rhetoric with magic, interweaving Cicero's art with that of the sorcerer-astrologer King Zoroaster. This overtly equates the two disciplines and highlights the illusory aspect of both. It looks at first glance, that Gower confirms, through this rhyme 'of rethorique' and 'magique', the mystical and magical efficacy of the oratory arts as found in classical treatises. But looking further, we find that Gower in fact disavows this. In Book VI, Genius condemns the magician as a mere creator of signs and simulations 'He makth ymage, he makth sculpture, / He makth writing, he makth figure (CA, VI, 1343-44). Gower explains that the sorcerer is a bender of truth, a master deceiver, expressed through his use of *rime riche* and memorable *traductio* - the repetition and wordplay on the different forms of 'guile':

²⁶⁴ Richard Firth Green, *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), p.207.

²⁶⁵ Vance, *Mervelous Signals*, p.266.

There is no man the which so doth
For al the craft that he can caste,
That he n'abeith it ate laste.
For often he that wol beguile
Is guiled with the same guile,
And thus the guilour is beguiled (CA, VI, 1376-81)

Gower unequivocally affirms the magician is a fraud. The sorcerer is an artificer who has no magical efficacy and neither do his figures, calculations, talismans, images, or words. His charms and sculptures are just verisimilitudes, they cannot affect the will of another person in order to make them fall in love with them. They can only distract the fallen soul, misdirect its attention toward temporal and corporeal things. In the Latin epigrammatic verse that commences this section Gower writes that magic is a demonic art (CA, VI, iii) and later in Middle English declares it the Devil's craft (CA, VI, 1351-57). Therefore, any 'wonder' claimed to have been achieved by the magician comes from the Devil and not from the inherent power of the rhetoric of his incantations nor his paraphernalia. The rhetorician, then, like the magician, is a sophist, a fraud, a beguiler. Both purveyors of nothing more than empty post-lapsarian words.

To conclude this example of the fall of Troy, Genius recounts one of the rhetorically strongest and most lyrical sequences of the whole poem. He says:

Word hath beguiled many a man;
With word the wilde beste is daunted
With word the serpent is enchanted,
Of word among the men of armes
Ben woundes heeled with the charmes
Wher lacketh other medicine;
Word hath under his discipline
Of sorcerie the karectes.
The wordes ben of sondri sects,

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 hevене
 Set everything or odde or evenē;
 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 pleasance wel the more. (CA, VII, 1564-1587)

Genius' skilful and effective use of *repetitio* here with 'the word' [...] 'the word' [...] 'the word', and his further use of sophisticated rhetorical devices such as *traductio*, *anaphora*, *isocolon* and *anadiplosis* helps to create a spellbinding incantatory rhythm that builds, and builds into a hypnotizing crescendo which, in turn, cleverly displays how perfectly distracting rhetoric and language can be. Importantly, these rhetorical repetitive devices further concentrate our focus on the root word of the whole passage - 'word'. These lines return us again to the dominance of the 'word', the 'word' that God 'to man hath gove alone', the 'word' that initiated this whole section and 'the word' that subsequently was turned to 'wicked us'. For Gower, everything is subject to the 'word'. The 'Word hath beguiled many a man' (CA, VII, 1564), Genius tells us, employing the same word he used to describe the deceptive effects of sorcery and Ulysses' tricks ('beguiled'). 'With word the wilde beste is daunted' (CA, VII, 1565), he continues, evoking Adam's naming and ultimate taming of the animals in Genesis 2:20 as well as paying lip service to his exemplum of Arion in the Prologue. But 'With word the serpent is enchaunted' (CA, VII, 1566), he remarks, again evoking his Arion passage but the singling out of 'serpent' is suggestive of the first rhetorical persuasion in the Garden of Eden in Genesis 3:1. And when this couplet is taken together, it perfectly contrasts the two Biblical accounts of the first use and abuse of language. Thus, we have our second

allusion to the Creation and Fall, in this segment on rhetoric, and the participation of language in both. When men on the battlefield have no access to medicine they are soothed by the words of charms (CA, VII, 1567-1569) but Genius reveals that ‘Word hath under his discipline / Of sorcerie the karectes’ (CA, VII, 1570-1571); that words equally form the very signs and symbols²⁶⁶ of the arts of sorcery which, again, links back to Ulysses and the deceptive powerlessness of magic signs in Book VI. ‘The wordes ben of sondri sects’, he continues and, as Matthew Irvin notes,²⁶⁷ this recalls the marginalia’s condemnation of the pagan sects of the Chaldeans, Egyptians, and Greeks in Book V²⁶⁸ as well as the ‘newe secte of Lollardie in the Prologue’ (CA, Prologue, 349). This distinctly links language, rhetoric, and the post-lapsarian verbal sign to Gower’s Lollardy which he views as a clerkly sin, writing that it is ‘betre dike and delve / And stond upon the ryhte feith, / Than knowe al that the Bible seith / And erre as somme clerkes do’ (CA, VII, 352-355). He writes, similarly of Lollardy’s linguistic origins, in his minor Latin poem *Carmen Super Multiplici Viciorum Pestilencia* on the *causa Lollardie* that ‘Ecce novam sectam mittit, que plebis in aures / Ad fidei dampnum scandala plura canit’ [Behold, he sends a new sect, which into the ears of the people / Sings many scandals to the detriment of their faith] (CSMVP, 30-31).²⁶⁹ Genius fully demonstrates the sheer ambiguity of language in the chiasmic lines ‘The wordes maken frend of fo, / And fo of frend, and pes of werre / And werre of pes’ (CA, VII, 1574-1576). This *antithesis*, like Plato’s *pharmakon* in the *Phaedrus* which can be defined as either remedy or poison,²⁷⁰ shows Genius’ idea of words is so unstable in meaning that their effects swing wildly between drastic opposites such as war and peace, friend and foe, odd and even, praise and blame, loud and soft, right and wrong, and speech and song. Because meaning after Babel is only conventional, words can be made to mean and say anything, it seems. And for this reason, Genius emphatically declares that it is the disordered word, the word ‘out of herre’, that has ‘this worldes cause entriketh’ (CA, VII, 1577). It is ultimately the

²⁶⁶ MED ‘carecte’ n.

²⁶⁷ Irvin, *The Poetic Voices of John Gower*, p.240.

²⁶⁸ See Peck *Confessio Amantis*, Vol. 391-392.

²⁶⁹ John Gower, *The Minor Latin Works*, ed. and trans. R.F. Yeager (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005). All Latin text and English translation of Gower’s Minor Latin poems come from this edition. The Latin ‘canit’[sings] here that Lollard scandals sing in is the very same that we find the Island of Brutus sings ‘canit’ its song in Hengist’s tongue in the opening Latin heading to the *Confessio*.

²⁷⁰ Plato, *Phaedrus*, ed. and trans. Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues*, 4th ed., 4 Vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953). See also Jacques Derrida, ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’, in *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1981), pp.63-171.

corrupted post-lapsarian ‘word’, with its incapacity to signify truth, which is remarkably behind the deception of the world in its entirety.

THE PHYSICALITY OF GOWER’S RHETORIC

In Plato’s dialogue *Gorgias*, Socrates interrogates the eponymous sophist on the moral legitimacy of rhetoric and in the end, ultimately, judges it to be no more than mere flattery, comparable to pastry baking and cosmetics in its ability to gratify and pleasure. For Socrates, rhetoric forms part of the physical, the sensuous and carnal pleasure-seeking world.²⁷¹ As outlined in Chapter One, Augustine’s definition of the *signum* in *De doctrina Christiana* is as ‘a *thing* which causes us to think of something beyond the impression that the thing itself makes upon the senses’. The sign is a *res*, a thing, and, therefore, is part of the material world; initially only apprehended through the corporeal senses. Augustine tells us in *De trinitate* that words are ‘corporaliter sonant’ [corporeal sonorities]²⁷² and in his *De Genesi contra Manichaeos*, he fuses the very origin of the body, the tunics of skin, with the birth of language and signs. In his *De ordine*, Augustine comments that the failure of human language to convey truth is due to ‘the corporeal matter of verbal signs’ (1.3.4).²⁷³ It is this corporeal make-up of signs that I wish to explore in Gower’s rhetorical discussion. A philological examination and close reading of this passage shows the sheer physicality of Gower’s rhetoric. It exposes the problematic relationship of eloquence and the ‘word’ to the world of bodies which, in turn, unveils Gower’s anxieties about the mutability and fallibility of language as a whole.

In the lines leading up to Gower’s section on rhetoric in Book VII, Genius gives a micro summary of the subject telling us that the art:

Which Aristotle hath also founde,

And techeth hou to speke faire

Which is a thing full neccessaire

²⁷¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. B. Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, Vol 2. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1953), pp.544-54.

²⁷² St Augustine, *De trinitate*, IV. 21.30, <<http://www.augustinus.it>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

²⁷³ St Augustine, *De ordine*, PL32, <<http://www.augustinus.it/latino/ordine/index2.htm>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

To contrepeise the balance

Wher lacketh other sufficance. (CA, VII, 1502-06)

Here Genius tells Amans that the science of rhetoric, the second part of ‘theory’, was founded by Aristotle and teaches one how to speak ‘faire’. The particular inclusion of the word ‘faire’ underlines the engagement of the bodily senses. Its definition from the *Middle English Dictionary* is on the one hand an object or person that is beautiful, attractive, and pleasant to the sight²⁷⁴ but also means a speech that is eloquent, elegant, and pleasing to the ear.²⁷⁵ So we can see, from the outset, Gower’s rhetoric is being placed in the material world of the body. The temporality of the ‘word’ is further emphasised when Gower opens his passage on rhetoric with his own allusion to the genesis of language: ‘Above alle erthli creatures / The hihe makere of natures / The word to man hath gove alone’ (CA, VII, 1507-09). Gower specifies that the word is earthly, *for* earthly creations and *not* divine. This sentiment is reiterated later in the passage when Gower remarks that the ‘word under the coupe of hevене’ (CA, VII, 1579), that language is part of the sub-lunar world, that is the temporal earth. Gower writes in his Latin heading to the section:

Compositi pulcra sermonis verba placere

Principio poterunt, veraque fine placent.

Herba, lapis, sermo, tria sunt virtute replete,

Vis tamen ex verbi pondere plura facit. (CA, VII, v.)

[Beautiful words of composed speech are agreeable in the beginning but the truth satisfies in the end. Herb, stone, speech are all three replete with strength; the force from words, nevertheless, produces more consequences.]²⁷⁶

²⁷⁴ *MED* ‘faire’ adj (1).

²⁷⁵ *MED* ‘faire’ adj (3) (a).

²⁷⁶ Translation my own.

Immediately we see the word ‘compositi’, itself a rhetorical term, meaning something composed, well-arranged, or constructed²⁷⁷, which shows us that Gower is strictly talking about an art form, a distinctively man-made speech, language that is shaped and moulded artificially by human agency. Gower refers to ‘rethorique’ as a ‘science’ (CA, VII, 1523 and VIII, 3066*) and an art (CA, VII, 1526), both borne of human endeavour but notably ‘scientia’, where we get the Middle English ‘science’ from, refers specifically to knowledge of temporal things. If we dig deeper and further examine the occurrence of the term and relatives of its root ‘compono’ in an example such as the Vulgate Bible, we find its meaning points towards the senses and the body. In Sirach 49:1 the term is used to mean the composition of sweet smells or the art of the perfumer²⁷⁸, and in 1 Maccabees 2:11 it indicates a woman’s ornaments.²⁷⁹ Moreover, in Judith 10:4 the term is used to denote a ‘dressing up’: ‘Cui etiam Dominus contulit splendorem: quoniam omnis ista *compositio* non ex libidine, sed ex virtute pendebat: et ideo Dominus hanc in illam pulchritudinem ampliavit, ut incomparabili decore omnium oculis appareret.’²⁸⁰ [And the Lord also gave her more beauty: because all this dressing up did not proceed from sensuality, but from virtue: and therefore the Lord increased this her beauty, so that she appeared to all men's eyes incomparably lovely]. In this instance the ‘dressing up’ of Judith is entirely external and bodily involving anointed oils, plaited hair, a bonnet, good clothes, sandals, bracelets, lilies, earrings, rings and other ornaments. Significantly, this adornment needs to be expressly clarified that it is *not* of a sensual nature implying that it *would* be the standard interpretation of such corporeal ornamentation and certainly this is how Patristic writers such as Tertullian later construed such physical embellishments.²⁸¹

Gower’s choice of the word ‘pulcra’ [beautiful] is also significant as there are preferable and perhaps more fitting words and phrases in the vocabulary of rhetoric available to Gower to describe attractive speech. One such is *bellitudo* meaning beautiful, pleasant, agreeable, or *venustus eloquii* meaning charming speech, and *gravitas* and

²⁷⁷ *DMLBS* ‘compositio’ (1) (a).

²⁷⁸ ‘Memoria Josiæ in *compositionem* odoris facta opus pigmentarii’ [The memory of Josias is like the composition of a sweet smell made by the art of a perfumer]. Emphasis my own.

²⁷⁹ ‘Omnis *compositio* ejus ablata est. Quæ erat libera, facta est ancilla’. [All her ornaments are taken away. She that was free is made a slave]. Emphasis my own.

²⁸⁰ Emphasis my own.

²⁸¹ See Tertullian below.

sublimitas which were both stylistic qualities long associated with verbal beauty.²⁸² Thus Gower’s lexical choice is for a specific reason. Mary Carruthers finds that ‘pulchritudo’, and therefore its derivatives and variants, is a ‘difficult’ word which is morally ambivalent and often applied to fancy boys and prostitutes as well as the more high-minded beauties of painting and prose and of nature.²⁸³ ‘Pulcra’ is a word without a stable known etymology even today, but, St Isidore of Seville nonetheless maintained that ‘pulcra’ was related to ‘pellis’ [skin] which, of course, evokes Augustine’s divine punishment of ‘tunicis pelliceis’ [garments of skin’]:

Pulcher ab specie cutis dictus, quod est pellis: potestea transit hoc nomen in genus. Nam pulchritudo hominis aut in vultu est, ut “os humerosque deo similis” [Aen. 1.589] aut in capillis, ut “namque ipse decoram/caesariem” [Aen. 1. 589-90], aut in oculis, ut “laetos oculis adflarat honores” [Aen. 1. 591], aut in candore, ut “quale manus addunt ebori decus” [Aen. 1. 592], aut in lineamentis [Cicero, *Verrine Orations*, 2.36...aut in proceritate, ut Turus [Aen. 11.683]²⁸⁴

[Beautiful, named *pulcher* from the appearance of the skin, *pellis*, was later used for other things. A person’s beauty is either in his face, as Virgil (Aen. 1.589) “his face and shoulders similar to a god”; or in hair, as Virgil (Aen. 1.589-90) “She <on her son had blown> beautiful hair”; or in the eyes, as Virgil (Aen. 1.591) “she conveyed to his eyes joyous charms”; or in whiteness, as Virgil (Aen. 1.592) “such as the beauty the hands bestow on ivory”; or in contour as, Cicero (*Ver* 2.89) “the shape and features of the hostess delighted you greatly”; or in height, like Turnus (Virgil, Aen. 11.683)].²⁸⁵

²⁸² Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p.166.

²⁸³ Mary Carruthers, *Beauty in the Middle Ages*, p.166.

²⁸⁴ St Isidore of Seville, *Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum Sive Originum*, <www.latinlibrary.com> [accessed September 29th 2017], Book X, 203.

²⁸⁵ St Isidore of Seville, *Isidore of Seville Etymologies: Complete English Translations of Isidori Hispalensis Episcopi Etymologiarum Sive Originum*, Vol. 1, (Charlotte, VT: MedievalMS, 2005), 10, 203, p.174.

Carruthers points out that throughout antiquity and the Middle Ages ‘pulcher’ is strongly associated with surfaces, including skin and hair as with Isidore’s etymology. Of all the instances of the exact term ‘pulchra’ in the Vulgate, the overwhelming majority are involved in the description of physical appearance and more than half are those of women with a particular use of the word with rhetorical effect in the Song of Songs²⁸⁶. ‘Pulcher’ is further linked with the word ‘colour’ (where we get rhetorical ‘colours’ from) which comes from the Old Latin ‘colos’ meaning ‘covering’ and itself cognate with the English word ‘hull’, the covering of a grain and is even further related to the verb ‘celare’ meaning ‘to cover’.²⁸⁷ So Gower’s choice of ‘pulchra’ expressly allows him to place a particular emphasis on external form, surfaces, skin, coverings, and ultimately appearances in relation to language thus forging further that relationship between body and the verbal sign previously offered up by Augustine. The sensual ‘dressing up’ and beautifying of words underscores rhetoric’s ability to delight the bodily senses, to excite the passions. Indeed, Aquinas famously writes that ‘pulchram enim dicuntur quae visa placent’ [beautiful things are those which please when seen].²⁸⁸ Beauty is, therefore, understood to be apprehended through the external senses, primarily absorbed through the eyes or the ears, sight and sound. And in the subsequent Middle English lines in Gower’s section on rhetoric he captures the very essence of this writing:

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 (CA, VII, 1550-1556)

²⁸⁶ See Gen 12:11, Gen 12:14, Gen 39:6, Gen 41:18, Ex 26:31, Num 24:5, Dt 8:12, Dt, 21:11, Ruth 1:20, 1Kings 15:9, 2Kings 11:2, 3Kings 1:4, Ezra 8:27, Esth 1:11, Esth 2:7, Prov 11:22, Prov 22:18, Prov 26:7, SoS 1:14, SoS 4:1, SoS 4:7, SoS 6:3, SoS 6:9, SoS 7:6, Wis 4:1, Sir 45:15, Jer 11:16, Dan 13:12, Dan 13:31, Mic 1:11.

²⁸⁷ Mary Carruthers, *Beauty in the Middle Ages*, p.181.

²⁸⁸ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, Q5, A4, <<http://www.corpusthomicum.org/sth4016.html>> [accessed September 29th 2017]. My translation.

Gower draws on the external again through his use of the verb ‘semen’ which as the *Middle English Dictionary* tells us, signifies outward appearance, countenance, or superficiality.²⁸⁹ Crucially Gower aligns verbal signs or ‘wordes’, whose exterior appearance is of goodness and that sound beautiful to the ear, with deceit and not with truth.

In the second part of the Latin heading preceding his section on ‘Rethorique’ Gower writes: *Herba , lapis, sermo, tria sunt virtute replete, / Vis tamen ex verbi pondere plura facit* [Herb, stone, speech are all three replete with strength; the force from words, nevertheless, produces more consequences.]²⁹⁰ This expression proved very popular with Gower as he includes a near identical phrase in his Anglo-Norman *Mirour de l’Omme* (MO, 25585-93) and Gower specifically highlights this phrase once again in his section on rhetoric, this time in Middle English:

In ston and gras vertu ther is,
Bot yit the bokes tellen this,
That word above alle erthli thinges
Is vertuous in his doinges (CA, VII, 1545-1548)

In each of these instances, Gower emphasises the power (vertu) of words but always concatenates them to herbs and stones. Herbs and stones are natural entities, *things* of the earth. Thus, by linking words to both herbs and stones Gower places them in the category of temporal and physical objects pertaining to the material world. There were many Latin proverbs, almost matching Gower’s, dealing with the power of words, herbs and stones and the phrase was most recurrent in manuscripts on the body and medicine. It figures in the Middle English version of Gilbertus Anglicus’ *Compendium medicinae*. It also appears in Latin in John of Arderne’s treatise on haemorrhoids and also in the Middle English version of the French physician Guy de Chauliar’s popular treatise on surgery *Cyurgie*.²⁹¹ It seems evident that Gower is thinking in terms of the body and the material

²⁸⁹ *MED* ‘semen’ v. (2) 1 (a).

²⁹⁰ My translation.

²⁹¹ Louise M. Bishop, *Words, Stones, Herbs: The Healing Word in Medieval and Early Modern England* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2007), p.92.

world when he chooses this phrase and we can see this further when he writes that ‘word above alle erthli thinges / Is vertuous in his doinges’. The word is once again described specifically as an earthly, therefore temporal, *thing*, this time as the most consequential of all such objects with Gower reinforcing the word’s externality and physical force through the gerund verb indicating physical activity ‘doinges’.

Turning to the concluding moments of the entire poem in Book VIII, we find that Gower directly opposes rhetoric and truth when the poet, having recovered his own persona, declares that he has not used the art of persuasion throughout his work:

For thilke scole of eloquence
Belongeth nought to my science,
Uppon the forme of rethorique
My wordis for to peinte and pike,
As Tullius som tyme wrot. (CA, VIII, 3115-19)

Gower demonstrates here that eloquence or style and rhetoric are linked to each other and in this case Ciceronian rhetoric involves (ironically with the use of alliterative technique) painting ‘peinte’ and choosing ‘pike’ words. Physicality is again apparent through Gower’s word choices here. To paint means to cover the surface of an object.²⁹² It additionally means to cover speech, to use words in a colourful or artful manner, to embellish language in its appearance²⁹³ and Gower uses it this way when he juxtaposes it, alongside the *formes fixes* of poetry, against the vainglorious excesses of clothing in Book I:

Of veine gloire excuse me,
That I ne have for love be

²⁹² *OED* ‘paint’ v. (2) (a).

²⁹³ *MED* ‘peinten’ v. (5) (b).

The betre adressed and arraied;
And also I have ofte assaied
Rondeal, balade, and virelai
For hire on whom myn herte lai
To make, and also for to peinte
Caroles with my wordes qweinte (CA, I, 2723-2730)

Words, like bodies, can equally be clothed and covered excessively. ‘Peinte’ also means to deceive, to give a false appearance to words, to colour language²⁹⁴, which Gower shows in ‘The Tale of Pope Boniface’ in Book II, where he again uses the ‘peinte / queinte’ rhyming scheme: ‘This cardinal his time hath waited, / And with his wordes slyhe and queinte, / The which he cowthe wysly peinte’ (CA, II, 2852-54). This rhyming pair of ‘peinte / queinte’ is one of Gower’s more frequent pairs, occurring together four times throughout the *Confessio*.²⁹⁵ ‘Queinte’ means in relation to language, words that are both crafty, deceptive²⁹⁶ and elaborate.²⁹⁷ ‘Queinte’ also denotes strange and unfamiliar terms undoubtedly meaning rhetorical tropes.²⁹⁸ However, Chaucer famously uses it as a sexual pun and euphemism in the *Canterbury Tales*. In the Miller’s Tale Chaucer uses the pun to refer both to clerkly language and female genitalia writing:

As clerkes ben ful subtile and ful queynte,
And prively he caughte hire by the queynte,
And seyde, “Ywis, but if ich have my wille,
For deerne love of thee, lemman, I spille.” (MT I (A) 3275-3278)

²⁹⁴ *MED* ‘peinten’ v. (6) (a) (b).

²⁹⁵ See Gyöngyi Werthmüller, ‘A Listing of the Rhymes in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*’ <<https://www.wcu.edu/johngower/scholarship/RhymeList/index.html>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

²⁹⁶ *MED* ‘queinte’ adj. (2) (b).

²⁹⁷ *MED* ‘queinte’ adj. (2) (c).

²⁹⁸ *MED* ‘queinte’ adj. (3) (a).

Chaucer uses ‘queint’ twice in *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*. In lecturing one of her husbands, she says: For, certeyn, olde dotard, by youre leve, / Ye shul have quente right ynogh at eve (WBP III (D) 332-333). And later she asks ‘What eyleth yow to grucche thus and grone? / Is it for ye wolde have my queynte allone?’ (WBP III (D) 444-445). And Chaucer almost certainly plays on this sexual aspect in the *House of Fame* where he uses the same queynte / peynte rhyming scheme as Gower, cleverly relating it to the intimate verb *aqueynteden* when Chaucer enters the Temple of Venus and reads the story of the lovers Dido and Aeneas:

What shulde I speke more *queynte*,
 Or peyne me my wordes peynte
 To speke of love? Hyt wol not be;
 I kan not of that faculte.
 And eke to telle the manere
 How they *aqueynteden* in fere,
 Hyt were a long proces to telle,
 And over-long for yow to dwelle. (245-252)

Though Gower, on the surface, may mean strange rhetorical terms when he uses ‘queinte’, perhaps this sexual and bodily secondary connotation, clearly so much part of its fourteenth-century meaning, remains in contemporary audiences’ minds. In fact, Gower engages in this exact sexual wordplay when he tells us that ‘Which thing ther mai no kinde areste / I trowe that ther is no beste, / If he with love scholde aqueinte / That he ne wolde make it queinte’ (CA, IV, 2311-14). And so, for Gower the *peinte* / *queinte* rhyming pair that he uses to denote the presence of rhetoric constitutes the covering (*peinte*) of genitalia (*queinte*). If we bring this to its conclusion, for Gower every use of rhetoric effectively re-enacts the Fall, which is the concealing of the sexual organs with fig leaves. The two semantic meanings of ‘*peinte*’ as embellishment and deceit in eloquence converge for Gower at the end of the *Confessio*. The excess of artificial

decoration of words and their intentional selection in speech is what Gower declares he has not used at the end of the poem and instead writes ‘That y have do my trewe peyne / With rude wordis and with pleyne’ (CA, VIII, 3121-2). Gower is purposely offsetting words that ‘peinte and pike’ with something ‘trewe’, that is his suffering expressed through ‘rude wordis’.

Augustine writes in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* ‘Ipsi enim sibi fecerunt praecinctoria de foliis fici, et Deus illis fecit tunicas pelliceas: id est, ipsi appetiverunt mentiendi libidinem relicta facie veritatis’ [For they made for themselves aprons from the leaves of the fig tree, but God made for them garments of skin. That is, having abandoned the face of truth, they sought the pleasure of lying] (II.21.32). Adam and Eve’s covering and concealment of the genitals by the fig leaves following the covering of the body with a tunic of skin by God corresponds with not only the first instance of human craft but also verbal artifice and the beginning of rhetorical art. Indeed St Ambrose, Augustine’s teacher, as Eric Jager tells us, employs a series of textilic nouns to figure fallen language as deceptive ‘clothing’: *integumentum* (covering, cloak), *amicus* (mantle, cloak), *involucrum* (wrapping), *tunica* (garment), and *velamen* (veil). The primal coverings of the fig leaves, where they added ‘delight to delight’ and ‘leaf upon leaf’ (*folia foliis assuentes*), represent human artifice in general ‘objects made by the hand of man’ (*manufactura*), as well as sensuality (‘shady pleasures’).²⁹⁹ Tertullian in his protracted misogynistic diatribe against the adornment of women *De Cultu Feminarum* [On the Apparel of Women] goes further than Ambrose and writes ‘et adornari tibi in mente est super pelliceas tuas tunicas?’³⁰⁰ [And do you think about adorning yourself over and above your tunics of skins?].³⁰¹ Tertullian claims that the origin of female ornamentation (clothing, cosmetics, jewellery, and perfume) comes from fallen angels who have copulated with women and revealed to them the scientific secrets and materials of cosmetic enhancement (I.2.1). The title use of the word *cultu* has a semantic range of things cultivated as well as things adorned. It also means things that are worshipped³⁰² and is the origin of the English word ‘cult’, which lends it overtones of idolatry.³⁰³ He

²⁹⁹ Jager, *Tempter’s Voice*, p.126.

³⁰⁰ Tertullian, *De Cultu Feminarum*, I.1.2, <http://www.tertullian.org/latin/de_cultu_feminarum_1.htm> [accessed September 29th 2017].

³⁰¹ Tertullian, *On the Apparel of Women*, trans. S. Thelwall, *Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 4, eds Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885).

³⁰² *DMLBS* ‘cultus’ n. (1) (2) (3).

³⁰³ OED ‘cult’, n. (1).

associates ornamentation with prostitution (I.4.2) and writes that painted colours are from the Devil ‘ab interpolatore naturae’ [the corrupter of nature] (I.8.2). Tertullian considers dying the hair different colours, simply curling it, and donning ‘cerussa et purpurisso et croco [ceruse (a type of white lead) and rouge of saffron] (II.7.3) commensurate to wearing a ‘faciem fictam’ [fictional face] (II.5.5). Alexandre Leupin explains that *On the Apparel of Women* ‘is more than a simple denunciation of the feminine body and its adornment. It also attacks the pagan art of appearances along with the entire civilization conceived of as perverted by the false, the artifice, and by the obfuscation of nature’.³⁰⁴ Indeed, there is an overtly pagan rhetorical tone to the whole piece and of particular note is Tertullian’s use of terms to denote this false apparel such as *colore*, *ornatus*, *habitus*, and *cultus*, terms whose collective semantic field includes the adornments of the oratory arts, thus giving the whole work a rhetorical, poetic, and scriptural dimension.

This negative conception of ornamentation, both physically and textually, becomes the antithesis of that which Ovid, Tertullian’s near-contemporary, espouses in his *Ars Amatoria*. Ovid, in Book III, instructs the female followers of Venus and Cupid to conceal their defects and beautify themselves with make-up, groomed hair, clean teeth, plucked eyebrows, perfumed ointments and artificial mannerisms.³⁰⁵ He famously begins that work declaring for artifice in the matter of love when he writes ‘arte regendus amor’ [love should be guided by art].³⁰⁶ Leupin remarks that ‘The Art of Love is also a treatise on rhetoric and writing, revealing the spirit of the oratory art in minute detail. The success of the body’s adornment does not depend on truth or sincerity [...] it is measured by the ability to produce an embellishment that wins assent or enflames desire, which amounts to the same thing. The orator, the poet, and the woman in makeup all play the same game’³⁰⁷ further adding that Ovid establishes ‘the dominance of rhetoric and adornment as successful illusion’.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁴ Alexandre Leupin, *Fiction and Incarnation: Rhetoric, Theology, and Literature in the Middle Ages*, trans. David Laatsch (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), p.36.

³⁰⁵ Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, Book III, <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ovid/ovid.artis3.shtml>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

³⁰⁶ Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, Book I, line 4, <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ovid/ovid.artis1.shtml>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

³⁰⁷ Leupin, p.34.

³⁰⁸ Leupin, p.31.

Gower makes a powerful connection between the ornamentation of the body and that of language in Book V of his *Vox Clamantis*. He writes of the ‘muliere mala’ [bad woman], the archetypical post-lapsarian sexually transgressive woman:

Mille modis fallit, subtiles milleque tendit
Insidias, vnus vt capiatur homo
Femina talis enim gemmis radiantibus, auro,
Vestibus, vt possit fallere, compta venit:
Aptantur vestes, restrinitur orta mamilla,
Dilatatur coxarum pectoris ordo suum;
Crinibus et velis tinctis caput ornat, et eius
Aurea cum gemmis pompa decorat opus:
Vt magis exacuat oculos furentis in illam,
Anulus in digitis vnus et alter erit
Non erit huius opus lanam mollire trahendo,
Set magis vt possit prendere compta viros:
Se quoque dat populo mulier speciose videndam;
Quem trahit e multis forsitan vnus erit. (VC, V, 339-52)

[She deceives in a thousand ways and sets a thousand snares in order to catch one man. Such a woman comes adorned with radiant jewels, gold and finery so that she can deceive. Her clothes are well arranged, her rising breast is bound up, and the pattern of her bosom extends her neckline. She adorns her head with tinted hair and veils, and the golden splendour of gems decorates her handiwork. In order to sharpen the eyes of the frenzied man upon herself, there is one ring after another on her fingers. It is not her task to soften wool by spinning it, but to be able to catch men when

she is all decked out. A showy woman lets herself be seen by people; perhaps there will be one out of many whom she can allure.]

It is clear that Gower, like Tertullian, also equates female ornamentation and apparel with deceptive practices. He closely associates this embellishment of the body with sensuality and further links it to harlotry. As we have seen in Chapter One and my Introduction, deceit and integument are both symptomatic of the Fall. Gower's linking of these aspects to harlotry only cements this idea. In the same book a few lines later he writes:

Dextra senectutis, tunc cum sit discolour etas,
Protegit antiquas picta colore genas:
Nam modus est tali casu quod femina vultum
Comat, vt vnguentis splendeat ipsa magis
Arte supercilia mensurat, labraque rubro,
Gracius vt placeant, mixta colore iuuat;
Sepeque caniciem medicantibus orhat in herbis,
Et melior primo queritur arte color;
Sepeque precedit denissima crinibus empta,
Proque suis alios efficit esse suos;
Sicque venit rutilus humeros protecta capillis
Et vultum iuuenis arte requirit anus.
Sepe crocum sumit, croceovelatur amictu,
Quo minus ex proprio lesa colore patet.
Quot noua terra parit flores in vere tepenti,
Tot habet ad curas femina feda suas
Non omnes vna pulcras se pingere forma

Crede, st est vsa quelibet arte sua. (VC, V, 393-410)

[When her years take on another colour, then the old woman's hand covers her aged cheeks with false colouring. For the fashion in such a case is that a woman beautify her face, so that by means of ointments she may appear quite handsome. She skilfully marks her eyebrows and daubs her lips with rouge; with blended tints, she helps them to be more becoming. She often dresses her grey hair with medicinal herbs, and cleverly seeks for a hue better than the original. She often goes out with a thick set of tresses she has bought, and makes another's locks her own. And thus she comes forth, covering her shoulders with golden hair, and by her art the old woman seeks to acquire the face of a young girl. She often puts on yellow, she is veiled in a saffron robe, whereby she appears less impaired in her own complexion. The shameless woman has as many flowers to attend to as the fresh earth brings forth in the warm springtime. Do not believe that all women paint themselves in this way, but each and every one uses her skill.]

The terms found in these two passages are familiar from those of the oratory arts and some are even used by Gower in the Latin heading to his section on Rhetoric in the *Confessio: compta, ornat, decorat, colore, arte, pulcras* allowing for a clear link in Gower's mind between post-lapsarian integument and rhetoric. The lines in these two passages are of course adapted from Book III of Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* and Gower tells us as much before rehearsing them (VC, V, 383-4). Nestled in between these two passages on the sins of embellishment and ornamentation in the *Vox Clamantis* is a section on the falseness of speech of, in this case, female lovers, thereby fully connecting the two concepts, physical and verbal:

Ha quociens fictis verbis exardet amator,

Dum temptat forme subdola lingua bone!

In vicio decor est, mulier si verba placendi
Non habet, vt fatuos prouocet inde viros;
Crebraque complexis minibus suspiria mittit,
Ne sibi pollicito pondere verba carent. (VC, V, 353-58)

[Ah, how many times a lover is inflamed by false words, when the cunning tongue of some worthy beauty tempts him! If the woman does not possess pleasing words to incite foolish men, there is charm in her very defect: with hands folded, she emits heavy sighs, and her words do not lack their promised effect.]

It is clear, that Gower does not use these physical terms unadvisedly. When he writes of ‘peinting’ and ‘piking’ words, then, he brings with it this large literary heritage of deception, fiction, artifice and integument. Consequently, then, a bigger picture is revealed and one by one, the terms that Gower chooses reinforce language and rhetoric as external and material artifice, a fiction that is part of the physical world of bodies, and like Jean de Meun in my example in the Introduction, an integument. In Augustinian terms the body is always representative of the post-lapsarian, the temporal, the corrupted, and the abandonment of truth.

As argued earlier, for Gower, ‘truth’ is the ultimate goal of language, the end, but only achievable in a pre-lapsarian world. In a short section on the subject of ‘Trouthe’ that follows Gower’s passage on rhetoric in Book VII, Gower writes ‘Among the vertus on is chief / And that is Trouthe, which is lief / To God and ek to man also (CA, VII, 1723-1725). ‘Truth’ is a virtue for Gower, the highest in rank. Gower tells us that Aristotle teaches Alexander that

He scholde of Trouthe thilke grace,
With al his hole herte embrace,
So that his word be trewe and plein

Toward the world and so certain

That in him be no double speche (CA, VII, 1729-1733)³⁰⁹

Here, Gower crucially shows that truth is permanently resident internally in the heart. It is the opposite of the external, carnal, and corporeal world. Inward truth must be embraced first before it can be expressed outwardly in sound. Signified and signifier, internal and external harmony are necessary to express truth and escape 'double speche'. This is further emphasised when Gower writes 'For if men sholde trouthe seche / And founde it nocht *withinne* a king, / It were an unsittended thing' (CA, VII, 1734-35).³¹⁰ A few lines later he adds that 'word is tokne of that *withinne*', which as we have seen in Chapter One denotes that word is the external sign of the internal thought. The word that looks 'toward the world' signifies that which is internal.

A 'SOUBTIL CAUTELE'

To conclude his section on 'Rethorique', Gower includes the example of the orations at the trial of the Catiline Conspirators as 'summarized by Cicero, reported in Sallust and rehearsed by Brunetto'³¹¹ in his *Li Livres dou Tresor*. The conspiracy, devised by the Roman Senator Lucius Sergius Catilina, also known as Catiline, was a plot to overthrow the Roman Republic and, in particular, the consulship of Marcus Tullius Cicero in 63 BC. Cicero ultimately unearthed the secret sedition, forcing Catiline to flee Rome. Of this, Genius tells Amans:

Bot for to loke upon the lore

Hou Tullius his Rethorique

Componeth, ther a man mai pike

Hou that he schal hise wordes sette,

³⁰⁹ Emphasis my own.

³¹⁰ Emphasis my own.

³¹¹ Georgiana Donavin, 'Rhetorical Gower', p.166.

Hou he schal hise wordes knette,
And in what wise he schal pronounce
His tale plein withoute frounce. (CA, VII, 1588-1594)

Once again, Genius stresses the artifice of rhetoric, specifically Ciceronian in this case, with the verb ‘componeth’, which Peck translates as a term for construction. It also denotes many different and varying parts being brought together, combined, and blended. The word most likely finds its etymology in the Latin ‘componere’ which relates to Gower’s ‘compositi pulcra’ of his Latin heading to this section, discussed earlier, relating to the body and the senses.³¹² Genius again makes use of the language of surfaces and clothing with ‘pike’ which not only means selection akin to the modern English ‘pick’ or ‘choose’, again as Peck translates it, but also signifies to dress finely, to be outwardly neat and polished.³¹³ This materiality is reinforced through Genius’ use of *anaphora* (Hou that / Hou he) and internal rime riche of ‘wordes’ which draws attention specifically to man’s ability to artificially position his words in a sentence like stones in a piece of metalwork - ‘his wordes sette’.³¹⁴ It additionally highlights the textilic imagery of how threads of an argument can be loosened or unbound (‘lose’) or tied up tightly in a knot (‘knette’), all extremely suggestive of rhetoric as a textual and linguistic weaving of words wholly evocative of Adam and Eve’s post-lapsarian integument when they sewed together their fig leaves.

Genius again underscores the external by focusing on how man ‘pronounces’ his words, how he publicly articulates his words, their aural presence and thus how they will be received by others. In essence, according to Gower, Ciceronian rhetoric focuses on the performance of words. This externality, indeed physicality, of words is further heightened through Genius’ choice of the word ‘frounce’. ‘Frounce’, stemming from the Old French ‘fronce’, primarily means a wrinkle or crease in a garment or on the skin such as wrinkles on the forehead but whose Anglo-Norman counterpoint, frequently used in the *Lapidaries*, equally denotes a blemish, corruption, or flaw on a precious stone.³¹⁵

³¹² *MED* ‘compounen’ v. (1).

³¹³ *MED* ‘pike’ v. (1) 5 (a).

³¹⁴ *MED* ‘setten’ v.

³¹⁵ *AND* ‘frunce’.

‘Cithero’s’ manipulation of words, in theory, is meant to serve communication making the legal argument clear ‘plein’ and without physical defects, obstructions or obfuscations (‘frounce’). However, these lines are extraordinarily ironic. The idea that picking, setting, knitting, losing, practising pronouncements of words constitute in any way the idea of ‘plein’ speech is comical. Cicero’s ‘pleine tale’ without ‘frounce’ is utterly artificial and his method is entirely rhetorical. And as we have seen earlier, Gower pairs the verb ‘pike’ most frequently with ‘peinte’ and particularly in his discussion of artificial language. Cicero, of course, is the Latin father of the oratory arts and Genius then, perhaps unwittingly, aligns ‘pleine speche’ firmly with rhetoric.

Genius explains to Amans that he will give an example of ‘Julius and Cithero’ (CA, VII, 1597) and of ‘Catoun eke and of Cillene’ (CA, VII, 1599), that is Julius Caesar, Cicero, Cato, and Silanus, who in the courtroom debated the fate of the conspirators ‘whan the tresoun of Cateline / Descoovered was , and of the covine’ (CA, VII, 1601-1602). It is clear that Genius aligns Catiline’s actions with secrecy and hidden intentions and correspondingly with treason, which as stated earlier, is an antonym for truth in the fourteenth century. Thus, by association with Gower’s inclusion of the term ‘treason’ it becomes evident that ‘truth’ is likewise on trial and its success or failure relies on the outcome of the case. Genius recounts how Decimus Silanus speaks in court first:

Cillenus ferst his tale tolde,
To trouthe and as he was beholde,
The comun profit for to save
He seide hou tresoun scholde have
A cruel deth; and thus thei spek,
The consul bothe and Catoun eke
And seiden that for such a wrong
Ther mai no peine be to strong. (CA, VII, 1607-1614)

Genius points out that Silanus' legal argument was lawful and correct and that he spoke on behalf of and for the benefit of the commons for this is who the traitors have attempted to initially deceive. Silanus states frankly and coldly that Catiline and his co-conspirators should by law be executed. Brunetto, who Gower is indebted to here, writes similarly of Silanus' brief speech:

Sillanus, s'en passa briement a poi de paroles sans prologue et sans couverture nule, pour ce que sa matire estoit de honeste chose, si comme de livrer a mort les traitors dou commun de Rome.

[Since his case was honest, Silanus contented himself with giving a few words, without prologue or any kind of blandishment, to the effect that the traitors of the roman people should be put to death]

In Brunetto's account, Silanus does not hide his words or meaning with rhetorical flourishes 'coverture' since his duty is to the people of Rome and his cause was honest 'genus honestum'.³¹⁶ In Gower's account the presence of any rhetorical *figura*, colours, linguistic embellishments, or any reference to style in Silanus' speech is utterly played down if not entirely absent. Instead Gower states that 'Cillenus' legal argument, his prosecuting 'tale' is honest 'to trouthe' as it serves and protects the 'comun profit'. He simply states that 'tresoun', which according to the *MED* means 'disloyalty, faithlessness'³¹⁷ but importantly, again, has a further semantic range of 'falseness and deceitfulness'³¹⁸ thus representing an antonym for truth, should be struck down and indeed should suffer a 'cruel deth'. Thus, Silanus in language devoid of rhetoric, backed by Cato, wishes to put Catiline to death, to discipline the body of the traitor, to publicly execute falseness.

³¹⁶ Brunetto terms the five degrees of credibility of a case or *modi causarum* as 'honeste' (*genus honestum*) which is a high degree, 'douteus' (*genus dubium*) which is a medium degree, 'vilh' (*genus humile*), 'oscur' (*genus obscurum*), and 'contraire' (*genus turpe*), which are all considered low degrees in his *Tresor* III, xvii, 4-9.

³¹⁷ *MED* 'treisoun' n. (1).

³¹⁸ *MED* 'treisoun' n. (2).

However, Julius Caesar debating for the defence, takes a very different route not only with an opposing argument to Silanus but with opposing language as well. Genius tells us:

Bot Julius with wordes wise
His tale tolde al otherwise,
As he which wolde her deth respite,
And fondeth hou he mihte excite
The jugges thurgh his eloquence
Fro deth to torne the sentence
And sette here hertes to pité
Nou tolden thie, nou tolde he;
Thei speken plein after the lawe,
Bot he the wordes of his sawe
Coloureth in another weie (CA, VII, 1615-1625)

‘Bot’, Genius recounts using a contrastive conjunction, Caesar, advocating for a stay of execution ‘deth respite’ and seeking expulsion of the conspirators instead from Rome, speaks ‘al other wise’. Genius, once again, makes use of the rhetorical device *rime riche* here to draw attention to the homonymic use of ‘wise’. Caesar’s ‘wise wordes’ become suspect and indeed challenged when in the next line we are told that his argument, the content and form of his legal debate, is to be recounted in a dissimilar manner to this. This dissimilarity overturns the potential wisdom of his *sentence* and immediately opposes it to Silanus’ tale told ‘to trouthe’. Indeed, Silanus’ legal ‘tale’ is now contrasted with Caesar’s potential fictional ‘tale’. Instead, Caesar specifically exploits ‘eloquence’ or style to ‘excite’ the judges thus using language and rhetorical practices to appeal only to the passions which ticks off two of Cicero’s aims of the orator to ‘ut delectet, ut flectat’ [to please, to move]. Alternatively, Caesar ‘coloureth’ his ‘wordes’ in an attempt to ‘sette

here hertes to pité' and turn 'fro deth' the 'sentence'. And 'sentence' can be read as homographic paronomasia having the dual sense of the punishment assigned to a guilty offender but also as linguistic or textual expression, and a doctrine.³¹⁹ David Coley writes that 'the crafted and seductive words of a soon-to-be tyrant, Caesar's "tale" draws from a dubious palette of rhetorical colours, appealing to pathos rather than reason and derailing the wheels of Roman justice in the process'.³²⁰

This use of rhetorical painting and linguistic subterfuge divaricates greatly from Silanus' and Cato's legal arguments which were told 'to trouthe' and 'plein after the lawe' which alerts the reader 'to the fact that Caesar's use of rhetorical colouring obscures the truth and runs counter to the law'.³²¹ Unlike his source Brunetto, who quite obviously approves of and esteems Caesar's artful use of language, his 'covertures' and 'moz dorés'³²² by dedicating almost an entire page to his speech in the *Tresor*, it is evident that Gower condemns such colourful concealments and deceit. In fact, Gower throughout all of his poetics correlates Caesar time and time again with the material world and the earthly body. In the *Vox Clamantis*, Gower links Caesar to the temporal world almost by metonymy. He writes:

Caesaris et ceptum mundi sibi signat honorem,
 Quo quasi mundane res famulantur ei
 Papa colens animas has dampnet viuificatque
 Corpora set Cesar subdita iure regit. (VC, III, 579-582)

[And Caesar's sceptre signifies the honour of the world as his, so that the affairs of the world are in part subject to him, as it were. In caring for souls the Pope condemns them or gives [eternal] life; but Caesar rules their bodies, which are subject to his law.]

³¹⁹ *MED* 'sentence' n.

³²⁰ Coley, *The Wheel of Language*, p.162.

³²¹ Götz Schmitz, 'Rhetoric and Fiction', p.120.

³²² Latini, *Tresor*, III, xxxvi, 1.

He is repeatedly set in opposition to the spiritual realm of the Pope and the world of the clergy. Caesar's domain, in contrast, is that of the earthly world and his law that of the earthly body of men. In the *Mirour de l'Omme* Gower writes, paraphrasing Mark 12:17, 'Rende a Cesar ce q'est a luy; / Ce q'est a dieu, a dieu tout si' [Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's, and unto God that which is God's] (MO, 18601-02) but that Holy Church desires to have it both ways since Constantine gave the Pope terrestrial possession of Rome and now they say that:

Mais du Cesar presentement
Car nous du Rome la Cité
Ore avons l'enheritement;
Pour ce volons de toute gent
Tribut avoir par dueté
Voir ly Judieu en son degré
Neis al puteine acoustummé
Ne serront quit du paiement:
Ce que Cesar ot oblié
En son temps, ore avons trové
Les vices qui vont a l'argent (MO, 18625-18636)

[But we now represent Caesar also, for we now have the heritage of the city of Rome. Therefore, we want to have due tribute from all peoples. Not even the Jews or ordinary whores shall be exempt from payment. What Caesar had overlooked in his time we have now found: vices that yield money.]

Here, Gower again associates Caesar with the temporal world and earthly goods, connecting him to the 'City of Man' and its vices of lucre, heathen religions, and the sexually transgressive. He signifies all that the Church should not and he is the archetypal post-lapsarian ruler. In the *Confessio* Caesar is the sole representative of the 'Age of Brass' (CA, Prologue, 714) in Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the composite statue of man and is therefore named as a major participant in the degeneration of the world. He is also associated, repeatedly, with battles, great triumphs of geographical conquest, and 'dedly werres' (CA, III, 2241) that have 'worldes cause' (CA, III, 2242). He is admonished further in Book VII's 'Tale of Julius and the Poor Knight' (CA, VII, 2061-2114) for his lack of largesse and is shamed into handing over some of his great wealth to an impoverished knight who previously saved his life. In the 'Tale of the Emperor and the Masons' (CA, VII, 2412-2526) he is in constant struggle with worldly vanities and 'flaterie into here ere' (CA, VII, 2439) who with 'wordes feigned, / The pleine trouthe it hath desdeigned' (CA, VII, 2441-2442). The materiality of Caesar's Ciceronian rhetoric, therefore, compliments Gower's other descriptions of 'th'emperour' throughout his works and the language he uses reinforces his temporality and Fallen state.

But as David Coley points out Gower, or Genius, fails to describe the outcome of the Catiline trial. Indeed, it is highly ironic of Genius, who repeatedly exhorts Amans to 'let nothing be forsake, / Tell pleinliche as it befalle' (CA, I, 210-11), to conveniently omit the point of the whole story -the unmitigated danger that unmonitored rhetoric can pose. Despite its implicit denunciation of Caesar's duplicitous speech 'the exemplum fails to report what might seem its most pivotal fact, that Caesar's speech alone is responsible for the senate's decision to pardon Catiline.'³²³ Caesar's rhetorical colours and emotional manipulation have successfully swayed and moved his audience to agree with his side of the case. 'Tresoun', it turns out, will not have a 'cruel deth' but will instead have mercy. Truth will not triumph in the courtroom or elsewhere. The attempt to discipline the bodies of the traitors, the embodiment of falsehood itself, is undermined by rhetorical manipulations. Rita Copeland has shown the relationship between scientific disciplinarity and the body as an object of punishment or discipline and argues that in particular 'rhetoric' had to be given a figural body, a transgressive and licentious one, so

³²³ Coley, *The Wheel of Language*, p.162.

it can be regulated and practice violent and physical self-discipline.³²⁴ This metaphorical connection between rhetoric and the disciplining of the body is especially heightened here in Gower's account of Caesar's flowery words, which in fact fails to enact the right physical punishment of the bodies of the conspirators. Copeland's relationship between the body, discipline, and rhetoric must go both ways and this failure of physical discipline, then, reflects back on Caesar's rhetoric, which becomes lawless, ungovernable, and impervious to discipline, which in turn has serious consequences for all Genius' disciplines or bodies of knowledge outlined in Book VII. Instead, falsity in word (Caesar's) and deed (traitors') has not been regulated. According to Augustine, in his treatise on lying *De mendacio*, 'For, once break or but slightly diminish the authority of truth, and all things will remain doubtful: which unless they be believed true, cannot be held as certain' (10.17). Thus, by using rhetorical language, which Gower places in opposition to 'trouthe' and which therefore is in itself treasonous, the speaker has broken the authority of truth leaving behind only ambiguity and uncertainty. In this exemplum, the audience made up of judges, swayed by Caesar's eloquence, cannot discern the difference between truth and falsehood and as a result it is ironically 'trouthe' that suffers a 'cruel dethe'. The example of the 'Catiline Conspiracy' serves to underscore Gower's main contention in this passage, that the post-lapsarian 'word' is irredeemably ambiguous and unreliable in the service of truth.

In conclusion, Gower's brief section on rhetoric offers up so much more than previously given credit for. A close analysis reveals that Gower follows thoroughly the Augustinian model of language and semiosis. It further demonstrates that Gower, too, views the 'word' as post-lapsarian and thus corrupted, corporeal, and carnal. Its externality places it in opposition to the interiority of truth and therefore for Gower, as for Jean de Meun before him, all post-lapsarian language is integument, all speech sophistic. With the understanding that grammar, logic, and rhetoric are all subordinated and subjected to the post-lapsarian and corrupted verbal sign, we can now examine Book IV and the section dedicated to the first founders and discoverers of all the Seven Liberal Arts.

³²⁴ Rita Copeland, 'The Pardoner's Body and the Disciplining of Rhetoric', in *Framing Medieval bodies*, eds Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), pp.138-159.

III: 'OF HEM THAT FERST THE BOKES WRITE'

In Book IV, in a section that Russell Peck editorially entitles 'On the Uses of Labour', Gower writes in the Latin heading that precedes it:

Expedit in manibus labor, vt de cotidianis

Actibus ac vita viuere possit homo.

Set qui doctrine causa fert mente labores,

Preualet et merita perpetuata parat (CA, IV, vii)

[Labour with the hands is useful, so that everyday actions and life a man is able to live. But the one who for the sake of instruction bears the labours of the mind prevails and produces endless merit.]³²⁵

Here, Gower appears to mark a difference between the benefits of labouring with the hands which produce the quotidian necessities such as food allowing man to subsist and that of labouring with the mind. This use of the mind allegedly reaps a much more sustained and indeed perpetual profit. But Genius, in his Middle English rendition, interprets it slightly differently:

And in this wise it is befalle,

Of labour which that thei begunne

We be now tawht of that we kunne.

Here businesse is yit so seene,

That it stant evere alyche greene;

³²⁵ Translation my own.

Al be it so the bodi deie,

The name of hem schal nevere aweie.

In the croniques as I finde. (CA, IV, 2388-2395)

Genius declares that it is the written word that remains behind like the evergreen tree in winter when the body ages and dies, perhaps a pointed and mischievous meta-textual-reminder to the elderly poet John Gower. Certainly, rather than being concerned with the perpetual spiritual merit that *doctrine* brings which is suggested in the Latin verse heading, or indeed the eternal nature of the wisdom imparted in these books of ‘hem that writen us tofore’, Genius is singularly endorsing *fama* and the permanency of the author’s reputation ‘the name of hem schal nevere aweie’. Venus’ priest sees a way to immortality through the perpetuity of the written word, like Brunetto Latini his source in Book VII whose overwhelming quest for *fama* is one of the reasons why Dante placed him in the *Inferno*. Genius appears to be encouraging Amans and the poet-persona of John Gower to write for the sake of vanity and nothing else. Vanity and pride are causes and symptoms of the Fall and, yet surprisingly, it appears that Gower succumbed to Genius’ attractive temptation for we find in the denouement of the *Confessio* that he has inscribed his own name in his fiction (CA, VIII, 2321, 2908). The ruse worked. Here we are over six hundred years later still reading and writing about him that ‘never aweie’.

It is in the context of this post-lapsarian abuse of *doctrine* and the textual sign for the sake of vanity and *fama*, that Genius breaks from his Ovidian repertoire to enumerate what appears to be a serious history of the civilized arts. Traditional scholarship has long viewed this section as a medieval cliché, a dull penchant by writers in the Middle Ages to painstakingly make lists of founders of arts, industries, and sciences such as those found in Godfrey of Viterbo’s *Pantheon* and Hugh of St. Victor’s, *Didascalicon*. I argue differently, however, that the brief parlay with Genius comes to symbolize the very failures of the post-lapsarian written word and its fallen authors. In this chapter, I argue that rather than presenting a view of the arts as a civilising and positive force on society, Gower offers up an entire history of the decline of the textual and verbal sign in a post-lapsarian and post-Babel world. I argue that he demonstrates the overwhelming effects of decay brought on by *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii* and the dangers it poses to

his own contemporary world as the original language is irreparably fragmented and corrupted and abused over time.

HEBREW: THE 'FERST LETTRES FOND'

In the next several hundred lines Genius provides a litany of the names of those writers that 'nevere awie' and further expounds on those who have endured to the present day in the 'croniques'. Given Genius' overwhelming interest in the written word, it comes as no surprise then that he begins with the very origin of the textual sign.

Cham, whos labour is yit in minde,
Was he which ferst the lettres fond
And wrote in Hebreu with his hond.
Of naturel philosophie
He fond ferst also the clergie (CA, IV, 2396-2400)

Cham was, according to biblical genealogy, one of the three sons of Noah along with Sem and Japheth (Genesis 10.1). In *De civitate Dei* (16.11), Augustine writes that the primitive and common language of the world, as outlined in Genesis 11:1 'erat autem terra labii unius et sermonum eorundem' [And the earth was of one tongue, and of the same speech], was Hebrew and named after the house of Heber. He writes that, according to Genesis 10:2, Heber was a descendant of the fifth generation of Sem (Cham's brother), in whom the universal language survived after the Great Flood and the dispersal and division of language at Babel.

Cum enim legitur unam fuisse linguam primitus omnium et ante omnes filios Sem commendatur Heber, quamuis ex illo quintus oriatur, et Hebraea uocatur lingua, quam patriarcharum et prophetarum non solum in sermonibus suis, uerum etiam in litteris sacris custodiuit auctoritas: profecto, cum quaeritur in diuisione linguarum, ubi lingua illa remanere

potuerit, quae fuit ante communis (quae sine ulla dubitatione ubi remansit, non ibi fuit illa poena, quae facta est mutatione linguarum), quid aliud occurrit, nisi quod in huius gente remanserit, a cuius nomine nomen accepit, et hoc iustitiae gentis huius non paruum apparuisse uestigium, quod, cum aliae gentes plecterentur mutatione linguarum, ad istam non peruenit tale supplicium? (16:11)

[For when we see that originally there was one common language, and that Heber is mentioned before all Shem's sons, though he belonged to the fifth generation from him, and that the language which the patriarchs and prophets used, not only in their conversation, but in the authoritative language of Scripture, is called Hebrew, when we are asked where that primitive and common language was preserved after the confusion of tongues, certainly, as there can be no doubt that those among whom it was preserved were exempt from the punishment it embodied, what other suggestion can we make, than that it survived in the family of him whose name it took, and that this is no small proof of the righteousness of this family, that the punishment with which the other families were visited did not fall upon it?]

This, according to Eric Jager, confirms that Augustine believed that the *Ursprache* that Adam used when naming the animals in Genesis 2:20 was Hebrew which survived unharmed through Sem's line.³²⁶ John Fyler observes that most of the Genesis commentators follow Augustine in the view that Adam spoke Hebrew and that it was the one language exempt from change.³²⁷ He writes that 'The less experimentally inclined patristic and medieval commentators are nearly unanimous in their view that Hebrew was the language that Adam spoke, and the sole language prior to Babel: indeed Vincent of Beauvais, copying Augustine, argues that "before the division of tongues it was not called 'Hebrew', but 'human' [*humana*] simply, seeing that all men used it in common." Isidore, like many others, says that Hebrew was the only language before Babel, and that Adam

³²⁶ Jager, *The Tempter's Voice*, p.55.

³²⁷ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.21.

named the birds and animals in Hebrew. According to several medieval narratives, Hebrew survived the confusion of tongues because Shem, or his descendants Heber and Peleg, did not participate in the building of the Tower.³²⁸

It should be noted, nevertheless, that Augustine himself does not explicitly write of the post-lapsarian Hebrew as untouched and identical to what Adam spoke in the pre-lapsarian Eden. In fact, he remains ambiguous about the subject. In *De civitate Dei* 16.11, he writes that the common language of the pre-Babel world was Hebrew but: ‘Quam ob rem sicut lingua una cum esset omnium, non ideo filii pestilentiae defuerunt (nam et ante diluuium una erat lingua, et tamen omnes praeter unam Noe iusti domum deleri diluuiio meruerunt)’ [Wherefore, as the fact of all using one language did not secure the absence of sin-infected men from the race - for even before the deluge there was one language, and yet all but the single family of just Noah were found worthy of destruction by the flood]. Here, Augustine maintains that the universal language and sin co-existed. But for sin to exist, the Fall must have occurred alongside the loss of the heavenly body, the alienation of the body to the soul which in turn constituted the corruption of the sign according to Augustine’s own analysis of Genesis as outlined in Chapter One. He writes further, in *De civitate Dei* 16:11, that ‘Nec Heber ipse eandem linguam in uniuersam progeniem suam refudit, sed in eam tantum, cuius generationes perducantur ad Abramam. Quapropter etiamsi non euidenter expressum est fuisse aliquod pium genus hominum, quando ab impiis Babylonia condebatur’ [In the same way, Heber himself did not transmit that language to all his posterity, but only to the line from which Abraham sprang. And thus, although it is not expressly stated, that when the wicked were building Babylon there was a godly seed remaining]. Augustine explains that only the line of Heber retained this primitive language, thus excluding Cham. Because of the godly remnant that lingered within this line, which ultimately leads to and ends with Jesus, he deems it superior, though not unequivocally unharmed, to other subsequent languages. He makes no mention of the Hebrew spoken by anyone other than Heber’s genealogical line. Dante, in *De Vulgari Eloquentia*, initially takes an Augustinian perspective when he writes:

³²⁸ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, pp.39-40.

Hac forma locutionis locutus est Adam; hac forma locutionis locuti sunt omnes posterius eius usque ad hederificationem turris Babel, que turris confusionis interpretatur; hanc formam locutionis hereditati sunt filii Heber, qui ab eo dicti sunt Hebrei. Hiis solis post confusionem remansit, ut Redemptor noster, qui ex illis oriturus erat secundum humanitatem, non lingua confusionis, sed gratie, frueretur. Fuit ergo hebraicum ydioma illud quod primi loquentis labia fabricarunt. (DVE, I, vi)

[This form of speech was used by Adam and by all his descendants until the building of the Tower of Babel, which is translated as Tower of Confusion. This form of speech was inherited by the children of Heber, who were known as the Hebrews. After the Confusion, it remained for them alone so that our Redeemer, who was to be born from them according to His humanity, might benefit from a language not of confusion but of grace. Thus Hebrew was the language formed upon the lips of the first speaker.]

However, in *Paradiso 26* of the *Commedia*, Dante revisits this question with a different outcome. Here when the poet meets Adam, the first man tells him that the language God gave him was a distinctly different one which was extinct well before the Tower of Babel and the Hebrew spoken now is mutated by the Fall:

La lingua ch'io parlay fu tuuta spenta
innanzi che a l'ovra inconsummabile
fosse la gente di Nembròt attenta
ché nullo effetto mai razionabile,
per lo piacere uman che rinovella
seguèndo il cielo, sepre fu durabile. (*Paradiso 26*, 124-129)

[The tongue which I spoke was all extinct before the people of Nimrod attempted their unaccomplishable work; for never was any product of reason durable forever, because of human liking, which alters, following the heavens.]

In the Latin marginalia to the Prologue of the *Confessio* we find written at lines 1018-26: ‘Qualiter in edificacione turris Babel, quam in dei contemptum Nembrot erexit, lingua prius hebraica in varias linguas celica vindicta duidebatur’ [How in the building of the Tower of Babel, which Nimrod erected in contempt of God, language, at first Hebrew, was divided by heavenly retribution into various languages.] It appears that Gower, or his contemporary reader and writer of the marginalia, was also of the opinion that Hebrew survived the Flood. We cannot know for sure whether Gower means that this Hebraic language or Cham’s Hebrew letters were of an unchanged Edenic language as Augustine might mean. Nor can we verify that he believed that it had become fallen with Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Paradise akin to Dante, who perhaps extracts this interpretation from Augustine’s passage in *De civitate Dei*. What we do know, nonetheless, is that Gower attributes the first textual sign ever made, which was in the Hebraic language, to Cham and not his brother Sem. Sem as founder of the Hebrew language was in line with biblical genealogy and was that which Augustine expanded on. The Semitic people were so called after Sem and it was his descendent Heber whom the language of Hebrew was named after. Abraham, the patriarch of the Hebrews, is a descendent of Arphaxad the son of Sem and, according to Luke 3:36, Jesus is a descendant of Sem. Peck in his footnotes to Book IV of the *Confessio* does not distinguish between Cham and Sem, stating that Cham is the eldest born son of Noah when in fact it was Sem, as we have seen, according to Genesis 10:1.³²⁹ Hugh of St Victor in his *Didascalicon* 2.3 credits Moses with the invention of the Hebraic alphabet³³⁰ and Ranulf Higden/Trevisa’s *Polychronicon* has Enoch as originator.³³¹ It is possible that Gower

³²⁹ Peck, *Confessio Amantis*, Vol. 2, p.394. Genesis 9:18 states Noah’s sons were Sem, Cham, Japhet in that order, as does Genesis 10:1. This order is taken to specify their age in descending order, making Sem the eldest. In Genesis 10:21 Sem is described as the elder brother of Japhet.

³³⁰ Hugh of St Victor, *The Didascalicon of Hugh of St Victor: A Medieval Guide to the Arts*, trans. Jerome Taylor, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1961), p.85.

³³¹ Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon Ranulphi Higden, Monachi Cestresis, Together with English Translations of John Trevisa and an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*, Vol 2, ed. Churchill Babington (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966-69), p.223.

confuses the names of the two brothers Sem and Cham in this section. However, the poet shows that he is fully aware of Genesis 10:1 in Book VII and names the sons of Noah in the exact same order as the Genesis passage.

Outake Noe and his blod –
His sonnes and his doughtres thre –
Thei were sauf and so was he.
Here names, who that rede rihte,
Sem, Cam, Japhet the brethren hihte. (CA, VII, 542-546)

And Gower mentions the three sons of Noah again in the same order in Book VIII:

Of Noe, which was seid the flod,
The world, which thanne in senne stod,
Hath dreint, outake lyves eyhte.
Tho was mankinde of litel weyhte;
Sem, Cham, Japhet, of these thre,
That ben the sonnes of Noe. (CA, VIII, 79-84)

Gower is equally aware of how the three sons divided amongst themselves the three parts of the world. To Sem ‘which was the sone eldeste’ (CA, VI, 557), he writes, was given the Orient (including Egypt, The Middle East and all of Asia) which ‘for that partie was the beste / And double as moche as othre tuo’ (CA, VII, 558-59) and ‘was graunted be comun assent’ (CA, VII, 556); to ‘the brother which was hote Cham’ (CA, VII 577) Africa was bestowed; and finally to Japhet ‘Europe tho tok he’ (CA, VII, 579). It is clearly evident that Gower knows the difference between Sem, Cham, and Japheth and so it is of

significance when Gower places the invention of the first textual sign, the Hebrew alphabet, in the hands of Cham instead.

Cham has an altogether different and more sinister lineage to Sem. Firstly, in Genesis 9:20-27 it is recounted that after a night of imbibing too much wine Noah, in his intoxicated state, falls asleep ‘uncovered’. Cham catches sight of his father’s nakedness and finding the scene amusing he runs to tell his two brothers. It is not quite apparent if Cham simply witnessed his father’s nudity or some act of moral depravity occurred and a comparison can certainly be made with Leviticus 20:11, which states that ‘qui dormierit cum noverca sua et revelaverit ignominiam patris sui morte moriantur ambo sanguis eorum sit super eos’ [If a man lie with his stepmother, and discover the nakedness of his father, let them both be put to death: their blood be upon them.]. Nonetheless, when Noah wakes up and learns what has happened he forever curses Cham’s son Canaan, father of the Canaanites, saying that ‘servus servorum erit fratribus suis’ [servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren] (Gen. 9:25). The ‘brethren’ in question are Sem and Japheth (Gen. 9:26-27) and Canaan was to serve and be subjected to them for the rest of his life, which later came to be used as a biblical justification for serfdom and slavery.³³² This is shown in Chaucer’s Parson’s Tale: ‘This name of thraldom was nevere erst kowth til that Noe seyde that his sone Canaan sholde be thral to his bretheren for his synne (CT, ParT, 766). Gower also shows his awareness of the story in Book VI of *Vox Clamantis* and, as James Dean notes, he laments Cham’s degeneracy by setting it in opposition to his father’s and his brothers’ purity³³³:

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. (VC, VI, 1215-8)

³³² Lee Patterson links Ham with the origins of European serfdom and ‘ungentilness’ in *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), pp.267-69.

³³³ Dean, *World Grown Old*, pp.247-8.

[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 scoffing Ham now exposes them.]

Cham's son Canaan, as Genesis tells us, is the father of the Canaanites. And the Canaanites were condemned for their heinous idolatry and it was the cause of their extermination in Exodus 23:24 'non adorabis deos eorum nec coles eos non facies opera eorum sed destrues eos et confringes statuas eorum' [Thou shalt not adore their gods, nor serve them. Thou shalt not do their works, but shalt destroy them, and break their statues]. In Deuteronomy 7 the Israelites are commanded that no league nor fellowship is to be made with the Canaanites

tradideritque eas Dominus Deus tuus tibi percuties eas usque ad internicionem non inibis cum eis foedus nec misereberis earumneque sociabis cum eis coniugia filiam tuam non dabis filio eius nec filiam illius accipies filio tuo quia seducet filium tuum ne sequatur me et ut magis serviat diis alienis irasceturque furor Domini et delebit te cito quin potius haec facietis eis aras eorum subvertite confringite statuas lucosque succidite et sculptilia conburite. (Deut 7:2-5)

[And the Lord thy God shall have delivered them to thee, thou shalt utterly destroy them. Thou shalt make no league with them, nor shew mercy to them. Neither shalt thou make marriages with them. Thou shalt not give thy daughter to his son, nor take his daughter for thy son. For she will turn away thy son from following me, that he may rather serve strange gods, and the wrath of the Lord will be kindled, and will quickly destroy thee. But thus rather shall you deal with them. Destroy their altars, and break their statues, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven things.]

Thus, Cham's descendants are not only the cursed enslaved, but also grave perpetrators of the vice of idolatry. A link is therefore formed between the origin of writing and idolatry, a link which Gower has freely allowed by naming Cham as founder of the first letters.

Both Fyler and Dean point out that medieval commentators often linked Cham's name etymologically and morally with Cain's.³³⁴ The Middle English version of the *joca monachorum* 'Questions by-twene the Maister of Oxenford and his Clerke' specifically links Cham with Cain by claiming that the former founded the plough³³⁵ when, according to such writers as Josephus, it was Cain that 'was thoroughly depraved and had an eye only to gain; he was the first to think of ploughing the soil'.³³⁶ Elsewhere, Cham is said to be the first sorcerer, 'who tried to draw sparks from a fire with the aid of a demon and was burned up in the process. The crowd who observed this, instead of seeing the catastrophe as God's judgement, began to worship him as a living star, or, in the case of the Persians, as the celestial fire Zoaroaster' which further draws on idolatry.³³⁷ In Book VII of the *Confessio* Gower indirectly makes this link as well. He writes in a section which directly precedes his passage on 'Rethorique', which Peck has termed 'Authors of Astronomy' since it deals with the textual inheritance of the subject:

The science of Astronomie

Which principal is of clergie

To dieme between wo and wel

In thinges that be naturel (CA, VII, 1339-1442)

Astronomy is part of 'clergie' or learning. In Book IV, we find that Cham 'fond ferst also the clergie' (CA, IV, 2400). 'Astronomie' deals with things 'naturel' and once again this links to Cham as in Book IV Genius recounts how the 'clergie' that Cham first discovered

³³⁴ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.36; James M. Dean, *The World Grown Old*, p.133.

³³⁵ MS Harley 1304, ed. Carl Horstmann, 'Questions by-twene the Maister of Oxenford and his Clerke', *Englische Studien*, 8, (1885), pp.284-7.

³³⁶ Flavius Josephus, *Josephus: Jewish Antiquities Books I-IV*, ed. H. St. John Thackeray, Vol.4 (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1930), p.25.

³³⁷ See 'Ham' in *Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), ed. David L. Jeffrey, p.327.

alongside the Hebrew alphabet was ‘Of naturel philosophie’ (CA, IV, 2399). There is a more direct link to Cham several lines later in Book VII in the passage on the authors of astronomy. Gower tells us that:

Of hem that this science write,
On of the ferste which it wrot
After Noe, it was Nembrot,
To this disciple Ychonithon
And made a bok forth thereupon
The which Megaster cleped was. (CA, VII, 1450-1455)

Gower writes that one of the first people to write about astronomy after Cham’s father Noah was Cham’s grandson Nimrod, who wrote a book of astronomical lore called ‘Megaster’ for his student ‘Ychonithon’. Gower doesn’t explicitly mention Cham here, but the link between Noah and Nimrod is, nonetheless present genealogically as well as through the art of astronomy. John Cassian writes in his *Second Conference of Abbot Serenus*:

How it was then that this knowledge of curious arts of which we have spoken, did not perish in the deluge, but became known to the ages that followed, should, I think, be briefly explained, as the occasion of this discussion suggests, although the answer to the question raised scarcely requires it. And so, as ancient traditions tell us, Ham the son of Noah, who had been taught these superstitions and wicked and profane arts, as he knew that he could not possibly bring any handbook on these subjects into the ark, into which he was to enter with his good father and holy brothers, inscribed these nefarious arts and profane devices on plates of various metals which could not be destroyed by the flood of waters, and on hard rocks, and when the flood was over he hunted for them with the same

inquisitiveness with which he had concealed them, and so transmitted to his descendants a seed-bed of profanity and perpetual sin. (Second Conference of Abbot Serenus (Chapter 21)³³⁸

And according to the *Glossa Ordinaria* PL 113.112, Cham is judged not as a ‘filius sententiam’ [son of wisdom] but as a [patre peccante] ‘father of sinners’.³³⁹ Bede follows this line of thought in his *In Genesim* and contrasts the lines of Sem and Japheth with Cham’s ‘in a way that recalls the dichotomy of the city of man versus the city of God in pre-Flood days’³⁴⁰:

Progenie Sem et Iafeth in uitae simpliittis innocentia permanentibus nascitur de stirpe Cham maledicta, qui statum humanae conuersationis nouo uiuendi genere peruerteret. Dum singulari poentia elatus, primum uenatu uiueret; dein, collecto exercitu, insolitam in populous tyrannidem studuit exercere. Denique in sequentibus renum habuisse et ciuitates maximas aedificasse legitur.

[While the offspring of Sem and Japheth remained in the innocence of a simple life, from the seed of cursed Ham [or Cain] a man was born who perverted the estate of human life to a new way of living. Carried away in his own power, he was the first to live as a hunter; then, having gathered an army, he busied himself in administering an unwonted tyranny against people. Finally, we read that he had a kingdom and that he built great cities.]³⁴¹

³³⁸ John Cassian, *Second Conference of Abbot Serenus*, trans. C.S. Gibson. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, Vol. 11 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1894).

³³⁹ *Glossa Ordinara*, PL 113. Translation my own.

³⁴⁰ Dean, *The World Grown Old*, p.134.

³⁴¹ Bede, *In Genesim*, ed. Charles W. Jones, in *Bedaes Venerabilis opera*, Part II, (Turnhout: Brepols, 1967), p.144.

As we have seen Cham's grandson was the infamous Nimrod and though not specifically mentioned in the Bible is reputed to have built the Tower of Babel of Genesis 11:1-9. Augustine in *De civitate Dei* 16:4, Josephus in his *Jewish Antiquities* 1.4.2, Isidore in his *Etymologies* 7.6.22, and Brunetto in his *Tresor* 1.24 all identify Nimrod as being the architect and builder of the Tower of Babel. He was also variously accused of being a wicked hunter, a giant, the first ruler of Babylon (beginning of empire), and a religious tyrant.³⁴² In *De Vulgari Eloquentia* Dante also connects Nimrod specifically to the Tower of Babel and artistic pride, in the following passage:

Presumpsit ergo in corde suo incurabilis homo, sub persuasione gigantis, arte sua, non solum superare naturam, sed etiam ipsum naturantem, qui Deus est, et cepit hedificare turrim in Sennear, que postea dicta est Babel, hoc est confusio, per quam celum sperabat adscendere: intendens, inscius, non equare, sed suum superare Factorem (DVE, I.vii).

[Thus incorrigible man presumed in his heart, persuaded by the giant Nimrod, to surpass by his skill not only Nature but even Nature's creator, who is God, and began to build a tower on Sennaar, which was later called Babel, or 'Confusion'. By this tower he hoped to ascend to Heaven with the mad purpose not only to equal but to surpass his own maker.]

This passage connecting hubris and human artistry anticipates Nimrod's appearance in *Inferno's* eighth circle, which houses the fraudulent, the counterfeiters, and flatterers and the tenth bolgia, where the personators, falsifiers, and alchemists reside. The Tower of Babel is not mentioned in Canto XXXI but, as John D. Sinclair points out, the word 'tower' occurs five times throughout³⁴³ and Nimrod's punishment is unequivocally linguistic. He cries out to Dante 'Raphèl may amèch zabi almi' (line 67), but his language is unintelligible, nonsensical, gibberish. It purposely masquerades as a genuine language

³⁴² Dean, *The World Grown Old*, p.134.

³⁴³ Dante, *Inferno*, ed. and trans. John D. Sinclair, p.393.

with the presence of grave accents as if there were a correct way of pronunciation or distinguishing one word from another. Virgil declares to Dante:

questi è Nembròt per lo cui mal coto
pur un linguaggio nel mondo non s'usa.
Lasciànlo stare e non parliamo a voto;
chè così è a lui ciascun linguaggio
come 'l suo ad altrui, ch'a nullo è noto.' (*Inferno*, Canto XXXI, 77-81)

[This is Nimrod, through whose wicked device the world is not of one sole speech. Let us leave him there and not talk in vain, for every language is to him as his to others, which is known to none.]

The phrase *parlare a vòto*, speech empty of communicative value, indicates the insuperable gulf, the void between *res* and *signum*, signified and signifier, that is the ineluctable part of mankind's fallen condition. As I have pointed out in the previous chapter, Gower also connects Nimrod to Babel and the divine punishment of linguistic dispersion and confusion in the Prologue to the *Confessio* (CA, Prologue, 1018-1024). In Book V, Gower likewise includes Nimrod (CA, V, 1547) in his long list of heathen idolaters of 'precious ymage riche' (CA, V, 1549) adding another reference to idolatry to Cham's invention of the first textual sign. In all biblical commentaries and contemporary literature, Nimrod is, as in Gower's description, the originator of the Tower of Babel that directly challenged the might of God (c.f. *Vox Clamantis* Book VI, 1216) and for this presumptuous human endeavour, the world is punished with the division of languages so that meaning falls entirely by the wayside. Cham's morally ambiguous reputation thus precedes him in this opening passage on 'Discoverers and Inventors' in Book IV. He is, as we have seen in medieval Europe, etymologically linked to Cain the first murderer and founder of the City of Man. His mysterious transgression against Noah made him the progenitor of slavery and his resultant cursed descendants became guilty of significant and consequential sinful acts of idolatry. Cham also became known as the founder of the

dark arts and astronomical lore by inscribing messages for himself, concealing them on rocks to find in the post-diluvian aftermath. All of this severely taints the written word in Gower's list. Ultimately, in Cham's invention of the textual sign in the Hebraic alphabet lies the spectre of Nimrod and the confusion of tongues at Babel, a linguistic fall second only to the original in the Garden of Eden. Just as Nimrod is descended from Cham, the dissemination of language at Babel is directly related to the discovery of the textual sign. Indeed, it is Cham's interest in astronomical lore that led him to scratch letters in his environs which must have been passed on to Nimrod as he is the first, according to Gower, to write a book on the very subject. And, of course, star-gazing is the initial motive for the building of the Tower of Babel itself. In the same way that the Fall gives rise to the Hebrew language, the Tower of Babel becomes the departure point for everything else that follows.

THE FIRST 'LETTRES OF GREGOIS'

In the ensuing lines, Gower tells us that it is 'Cadmus the lettres of Gregois / Ferst made upon his oghne chois' (CA, 2401-02). Cadmus the founder of the written Greek language is an equally troubled figure for Gower to have chosen. Cadmus as progenitor of the first Greek textual sign has precedence in Pliny, who writes in his *Natural History* that Cadmus is the 'first to write in [Greek] prose'.³⁴⁴ Isidore of Seville, in his *Etymologies*, writes that 'Cadmus son of Agenor brought seventeen Greek letters from Phoenicia into Greece: A, B, Γ, Δ, E, Z, I, K, Λ, M, N, O, Π, P, Σ, T, Φ'.³⁴⁵ This is also found in Godfrey of Viterbo's *Pantheon*³⁴⁶ and Hugh St Victor's *Didascalicon*.³⁴⁷ Gower probably took this information from Isidore as did Boccaccio, who writes similarly of Cadmus in his *De Casibus Virorum Illustrium* I, 6 and, again, in his *Genealogie Deorum* II: 63. Lydgate in his *Fall of Princes*, taking his cue from Boccaccio, writes that Cadmus 'tauhte figures and lettris for to write / And made lawes off ful gret ordynance' (I. 1956-7).³⁴⁸ More

³⁴⁴ Pliny the Elder, *The Natural History*, ed. Henry T. Riley and trans. John Bostock (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1855-57), v. 31.

³⁴⁵ St Isidore of Seville, *Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans Stephen A. Barney, W.J. Lewis, J.A. Beach, Oliver Berghof (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p.40, l.iii, 6-iv.4.

³⁴⁶ Godfrey of Viterbo, *Pantheon*, 6, col.157, trans. H. Ulmann in *Gottfried von Viterbo* (Göttingen, 1863 dissertation).

³⁴⁷ Hugh St Victor, *Didascalicon*, 3.2., trans. Jerome Taylor, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1961).

³⁴⁸ John Lydgate, *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen, 4 Vols, EETS (London: Oxford University Press, 1924).

relevant here, for Genius and Gower, is that Cadmus' story can be located in Book III of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

Ovid recounts, in this text, the tale of Cadmus' sister Europa, who is abducted by Jupiter/Jove. Cadmus, the son of Agenor the King of Phoenicia, is ordered by his father to go in search for her or else suffer exile if he fails to locate her. Having wandered all over the world without success, he makes a pilgrimage to the oracle of Apollo, who advised him to leave aside the pursuit of his sister and follow a certain heifer until she lies down in the grass. There he is to build a city. Cadmus finds the heifer and follows it until she eventually came to rest down on the grass. But unbeknown to Cadmus, he had disturbed and angered a monster serpent/dragon creature sacred to Mars, who had been guarding a nearby spring and who had slaughtered his servants. He was thus forced to battle it to death. Having fought long and hard he successfully overcame the dragon, but his patroness Pallas/Athena advised him to plough up the earth and sow the dragon's teeth in the soil. He did and to his astonishment up grew a row of armoured soldiers. The earthborn brethren immediately turned on each other, wounding and massacring one another until only five soldiers remained. These five warriors, the *Spartoi*, became the first inhabitants of the City of Thebes, which Cadmus founded then and there. Thus Thebes, Cadmus' very personal city, was founded on the back of extreme bloodshed and violence. It was an ominous start and one that continued to be ill-fated and ill-starred. Kim Zarins remarks that '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'.³⁴⁹ Indeed, mythological Thebes was home to a myriad of unfortunate and doomed events. Cadmus himself, at the end of his life, is transmuted into a serpent as punishment for offending Mars when he slew his sacred dragon/serpent. Ovid tells the story in *Metamorphoses* IV 586-87, recounting how Cadmus fell to the ground on his belly like a snake and was transmogrified firstly by his rear legs, then arms, hands and lastly it is Cadmus' tongue, the instrument of rational speech, that is torn asunder and split into two: 'sed lingue repente / in partes est fiss duas nec verba volenti / sufficiunt, quotiensque aliquos parat edere questus, / sibilat: hanc illi vocem natura reliquit' [his tongue divided into two parts – though he wished to speak, words failed him : whenever he made an attempt to lament his fate, he hissed . That was all the voice Nature left him.] (*Met.* IV, 586-89). Accordingly, Cadmus ends his days as a bilingual 'bilinguis' serpent

³⁴⁹ Kim Zarins, 'Writing the Zodiac', p.152.

unable to make himself understood. Cadmus, the founder of the Greek alphabet, the second known invented (post-Babel) language in Genius' list, lives out the rest of his life as a practitioner of 'double speech'. The serpent was the enemy of mankind and with his forked tongue was the biblical father of lies. Gower leaves no doubt in Book II of the *Confessio* as to how he feels about duplicitous speech which he terms 'bilinguis' (double-tongued) which lends more than a bit of tension to his own 'bilingual' text. Here, he emphasises in every line the rift between word and deed that results from 'bilinguis':

Nil bilinguis aget, nisi duplo concinat ore,
Dumque diem loquitur, nox sua vota tegit,
Vultus habet lucem, tenebras mens, sermo salute,
Actus set morbum dat suus esse grauem
Pax tibi quam spondet, magis est prenostica guerre;
Comoda si dederit, disce subesse dolum.
Quod patet esse fides in eo fraus est, que politi
Principium pacti finis habere negat. (CA, II, iv)

[A double-talker will undertake nothing without singing with a double mouth, and while he speaks in daylight, night covers his intentions. His face holds light, his mind shadows; his words healing, but his action produces grave illness. The peace that he solemnly promises you is a foreshadowing of greater war; if he should offer helpfulness, learn that guile lies underneath it. What lies displayed as faith is fraud inside, and the conclusion of a crafted truce denies the beginning it had.]

Words and deeds are conveyed, by Gower, as opposites in the post-lapsarian world and analogous to such irreconcilable differences as light (*lucem*) and dark (*tenebras*), face (*vultus*) and mind (*mens*), health (*salute*) and illness (*morbum*), peace (*pax*) and war (*guerre*), faith (*fides*) and fraud (*fraus*). This antithesis reinforces the duplicitous nature of the double-talker and readily recalls Gower's passage on the ambiguity of the 'word' in his exposition on rhetoric in Book VII of the *Confessio*.

Dante, additionally, uses Cadmus as an example of mutation in *Inferno* XXV in the thieves' ditch. Here, he invokes Ovid and writes contemptuously of both Cadmus and the Latin poet thus:

Taccia di Cadmo e d'Aretusa Ovidio;
chè se quello in serpent e quella in fonte
converte poetando, io non lo 'nvidio
chè due nature mai a fronte a fonte
non trasmutò sì ch'amendue le forme
a cambiar lor matera fosser pronte (*Inferno*, XXV, 97-102)

[Let Ovid be silent about Cadmus and Arethusa; for if in his lines he turns him into a serpent and her into a fountain, I do not grudge it to him, for two natures face to face he never so transmuted that both kinds were ready to exchange their substance.]

In this canto, Dante makes use of the language of failed alchemy to convey the notion that Ovid's transmutations were merely fictions and not real.

Another pertinent example can be found in Jean de Meun's portion of *Le Roman de la Rose* in a section entitled 'The Sermon of Genius', the substance of which can be reduced to 'go forth and multiply'. In this section, he makes a protracted and vivid link between writing and sexual generation. Through thinly veiled paronomasia, Genius encourages men, and Amant, to use their styluses to write their legacy on fair and precious tablets so they may live forever. He chastises those who will not rightfully use their styluses to write on tablets or hammers to forge on anvils. He further excoriates those that follow the example of Orpheus by despising the straight furrow of the fair and fertile field and instead plough the desert ground where their seed is wasted. Genius offers, in contrast to the overturned plough of Orpheus, the example of the 'post-lapsarian figure of Cadmus'³⁵⁰ as one who 'ploughed' excessively and successfully multiplied according to Genius' sermonic exhortation. Thus Cadmus becomes an exemplar of fornication, of heterosexual erotic and concupiscent love. Genius says tells Amant:

Et quant aré auré assés
Tant que d'arer sere lassés
Que la besoingne à ce vendra

³⁵⁰ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.84.

Que reposer vous convendra
(Car chose sans reposerment
Ne puet pas durer longuement)
Tantost por l'uevre ravancier;
Du voloir ne soiés pas las
Cadmus, au dit dame Palas,
De terre ara plus d'ung arpent
Et sema les den d'un serpent
Dont chevalier armé saillierent
Qui tant entr'eus se combatirent,
Que tuit en la place morurent,
Fors cinq qui si compaignon furent,
Et li voldrent secors douner
Quant il dut les murs maçonner
De Thebes, dont il fut fondierres
Cis assistrent o li les pierres,
Et li pueplerent sa cité
Qui est de grant antiquité
Moult fist Cadmus bonne semence,
Qui le sien people ainsinc avance;
Se vous ausinc – bien commenciés,
Vos lignaiges moult avanciés (RR, 20439-20464)

[When you have ploughed so much that you are weary of ploughing (for things will come to a point where you will need some respite, and nothing can last long without rest), you will not immediately be able to begin again to advance the work, but do not let your desire flag. On the instructions of Lady Pallas, Cadmus ploughed more than an acre of ground and sowed the teeth of a serpent. Armed knights sprang from these and fought with one another until all died on the spot, except for five, who became his companions and gladly helped him build the walls of Thebes, which he founded. With him, they positioned the stones and populated his city, which is of great antiquity. Cadmus sowed excellent seed, which was thus

of benefit to his people. If your beginning is as favourable, your lineage will benefit greatly.]

Most famously, Thebes, often metonymically termed the House of Cadmus, was the kingdom that Oedipus came to reign over. It is where his unwitting patricide and incestuous relationship initiated a deleterious civil war and rancorous fratricide. The all-encompassing theme of destructive fraternal discord is at the heart of Thebes and particularly Statius' *Thebaid*, a book well known to Gower. It enjoyed great popularity throughout the Middle Ages and was the only other Roman epic at this time, apart from Virgil's *Aeneid*, to engender its own literary tradition.³⁵¹ The deadly strife occurred between Oedipus' cursed sons Eteocles and Polynices who, unable to share Theban rule peacefully, tragically kill each other. This story as recounted in Statius is most certainly mirrored in Chaucer's characters of Palamon and Arcite in his *Knight's Tale*. Thebes, additionally suffered the tyranny of Creon, one of Cadmus' direct descendants, a cruel and rightly embattled ruler who is featured in Sophocles' *Antigone* as well as *The Knight's Tale*, where he is described as 'tiraunt' (KnT, 961) of 'Thebes the citee, / Fulfild of ire and of iniquitee' (KnT, 939-940). John of Salisbury in his *Policraticus* writes of Thebes as a city that is 'befouled with parricide, incest, deception, and perjury.'³⁵² In Canto XXXIII of Dante's *Inferno*, in the lowest circle dedicated to the treachery of kin and country, he identifies Ugolino as a traitor to his city of Pisa, which Dante gives the moniker of 'novella Tebe' [New Thebes].³⁵³ John Freccero observes that 'the ancient city, raised from dragon's teeth and nurtured in parricide and fratricide, is Dante's model for the city of man throughout the *Inferno*, the crystallization of the disease that afflicts all of mankind.'³⁵⁴ This city of iniquity, this Augustinian city of man that rivals Troy and Babylon was furthermore the war-time setting for Chaucer's first foray into Theban mythology *Anelida and Arcite*, where the Queen of Armenia Anelida laments her cruel betrayal in love by the false Theban Arcite. And we find that Gower recounts the story of Capaneus, whose arrogance and pride at the Siege of Thebes caused his sudden incendiary death when 'Godd tok himselve the bataille / Agein his Pride, and fro the sky

³⁵¹ Dominique Battles, *The Medieval Tradition of Thebes: History and Narrative in the OF Roman de Thèbes, Boccaccio, Chaucer, and Lydgate* (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), p.1.

³⁵² John of Salisbury, *Fivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers*, trans. Joseph B. Pike (Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota University Press, 1938), 1.4, p.14.

³⁵³ Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. John D. Sinclair (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939).

³⁵⁴ John Freccero, *Dante: The Poetics of Conversion* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), p.154.

/ Afiry thunder sodeingly / He sende, and him to pouldre smot.’ (CA, I, 2000-2003). Lee Patterson remarks that ‘the Theban legend harshly argues that the natural self is by definition ill-behaved and self-defeating, an unconstrained appetitiveness that bespeaks not a transcendent origin but one that is primordial and earthbound’.³⁵⁵ Cadmus and his first ‘lettres of Gregois’ cannot, therefore, claim a virtuous heritage but, on the contrary, find themselves overwhelmingly weighed down by the vices of violence, murder, fornication, incest, and deceit.

Above all, we find that Gower commences his entire literary fiction in Book I of the *Confessio* with Genius’ narration of the Ovidian story of Cadmus’ grandson ‘A worthi lord, which Acteon / Was hote, and he was cousin nyh / To him that Thebes ferst on hyh / Up sette, which king Cadme hyhte’ (CA, I, 336-339). Cadmus’ grandson, whom he handed over power to in his old age, comes to a savagely tragic end when he ogles the virgin goddess Diana, whom he has stumbled across bathing naked in the wood while out hunting: ‘Bot he his yhe away ne swerveth / Fro hire which was naked al’ (CA, I, 366-7). She catches him red-handed, staring longingly at her naked body and is angered by this exposure and so in vengeance she ‘made him taken of an hert’ (CA, I, 371) and set her hounds on him who utterly tear him to shreds ‘al todrowhe’ (CA, I, 378). The story takes place in Thebes, a city as we have seen associated throughout literature with immorality, violence, and untamed lust and this story is no exception. It is Genius’ opening exemplum, an illustration of the dangerous and inevitable weaknesses of the bodily senses, which helps to pitch the tone for the rest of the *Confessio*. Thus, through the name of Cadmus and his setting of Thebes, Gower launches Genius’ literary fiction with an overarching allusion to text and language. Cadmus’ association with violence, iniquity, mutability, bilingualism and the chasm between word and deed that comes with it, serves only to utterly ‘befoul’ the Greek textual sign.

Further to Gower’s choice of Cadmus as originator of the first Greek textual sign he writes that: ‘Theges of thing which schal befall, / He was the ferste augurre of alle’ (CA, IV, 2403-04). Tages was the founder of the Etruscan religion and believed to have been a soothsayer and divinator - a person who purports to read the future and divine will through different signs. Cicero writes, in his rather tongue-in-cheek, *De Divinatione* [*On Divination*] that ‘Gentem quidem nullam video neque tam humanam atque doctam neque

³⁵⁵ Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p.78.

tam immanem tamque barbaram, quae non significari futura et a quibusdam intellegi praedicique posse censeat'³⁵⁶ [Now I am aware of no people, however refined and learned or however savage and ignorant, which does not think that signs are given of future events, and that certain persons can recognize those signs and foretell events before they occur].³⁵⁷ He proceeds to tell the miraculous story of Tages and how he sprung up from a ploughed furrow in the ground and began to discourse in the presence of those who had gathered around who recorded his speech by writing it down. This written text, he says, became the foundation of the science of the soothsayers.³⁵⁸ Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses*, similarly recounts how an Etruscan ploughman witnessed the lump of sod take the form of man and with his newly-formed lips revealed the shape of things to come. Ovid credits Tages with being the first to teach the Etruscan race how to discover the future.³⁵⁹ Hugh of St Victor reiterates in his *Didascalicon* that Tages first gave soothsaying to the Etruscans.³⁶⁰ Thus Gower, through Genius, very specifically tells us that the next notable thing to happen post Cadmus' discovery of the Greek textual sign is the foundation of the pagan and superstitious arts of the occult. As we have seen in Chapters One and Two, Gower, like Augustine, gives no credence to these heathen arts of soothsaying, viewing them instead as fraudulent and meretricious. Gower, in Book IV of his *Vox Clamantis* on hypocrisy, writes 'Phiton sive Magus est scismaticus, quia turbat, / Verum quod credis et dubitanda mouet' [A soothsayer or a magician is a schismatic, since he confuses the truth which you believe and promotes what should be doubted]. It is evident that language and signs (both natural and given) have begun to be misunderstood and consequently abused. Gower highlights the role that the written word played, from its inception, in the dissemination of knowledge of false gods and false arts - a link that brings writing ever closer to idolatry.

Coming directly after 'Theges' and his discovery of augury, Genius tells us that 'Philemon be the visage / Fond to describe the corage.' (CA, IV, 2405-06). Genius is referencing the art of physiognomy, where the practitioner purports to be able to read the

³⁵⁶ Cicero, *De divinatione*, I.2 <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cicero/divinatione1.shtml>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

³⁵⁷ Cicero, *On Divination*, I.2 trans. William Armistead Falconer (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1923), vol. XX.

³⁵⁸ Cicero, *De Divinatione*, II.50-51, <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cicero/divinatione1.shtml>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

³⁵⁹ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, XV, 553-559, trans. Mary Innes, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1955, repr. 1976).

³⁶⁰ Hugh St Victor, *Didascalicon*, vi.xv, trans. Jerome Taylor, (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1961).

external signs of another person's body to calculate their inner disposition and character in an effort to predict future behaviour. The story of 'Philemon' can be found in one of Gower's major sources for Book VII *Secreta Secretorum*, which Fox tells us is 'at the beginning of the section on physiognomy'.³⁶¹ Philemon, whom scholars knew as Antoninus Polemon, was a rhetor, friend of Hadrian, and skilled author of a book on physiognomy. According to the story, the students of Hippocrates drew a picture on parchment of their master and showed it to 'Philemon' in order to test his physiognomic skill. Philemon accepted the challenge and examined the portrait inspecting all its parts and figures. He came to a swift but damning conclusion that the portrait was of a man who was crafty, deceptive, lecherous, and given to fornication. The students were conceivably infuriated and wanted to kill 'Philemon' as Hippocrates' reputation was that of a highly regarded and dignified man. But 'Philemon' protests and tells the students that he only analysed and subsequently interpreted the picture according to his science. With that, the students return to Hippocrates and tell him what had transpired. To their great astonishment, Hippocrates admits that Philemon's analysis was entirely accurate as he has, in fact, battled throughout his life with these exact traits but that it was only through sheer force of will that he has managed to overcome these vices. This story, which undoubtedly Gower had read, on the one hand shows the potential of the science of physiognomy, the Greek theory of inference as described in Chapter One, to be accurate to the learned but, equally, demonstrates that involuntary (natural) external signs can, nonetheless, be misleading and are powerless to determine future events and behaviours of people. This story reveals that a person, through discipline and reason, can learn to control their natural inclinations. Indeed, the science of physiognomy is at complete odds with Christian doctrine, which endorses the view that the Christian can overcome his sinful tendencies through self-control and in fact Joseph Ziegler notes that this exact passage containing the story of 'Philemon' was used by several commentators to advocate the necessity for caution in using the science of physiognomy to analyse Christians.³⁶²

Moreover, the discovery of physiognomic theory of inference, in Genius' list, occurs directly after the invention of the Greek alphabet suggesting a link between the

³⁶¹ George G. Fox, *Mediaeval Sciences*, p.28.

³⁶² J. Ziegler, 'Text and Context: On the Rise of Physiognomic Thought in the Later Middle Ages', in *De Sion Exhibit Lex et Verbum Domini de Hierusalem. Essays on Medieval Law, Liturgy and Literature in honour of Amnon Linder*, ed. Yitzhak Hen (Turnhout: Brepols, 2001), pp. 159-82, p.162.

two. The rhyming antithesis of ‘visage’ and ‘corage’, external and internal is indicative of the Augustinian post-lapsarian loss of the heavenly, transparent body which could not conceal thoughts. In its place is the external fleshly body that has barred knowledge of the interior. Thus, physiognomy represents a failed attempt at recovering meaning in a world where human relations and communication were breaking down or decaying. Genius is suggesting that after the loss of the common language, it is the post-Babel Greeks who have fully cemented the break between word and deed to the point that humans are now unreadable to each other and signs both natural and given, as pointed out earlier, are being both misunderstood and manipulated.

Returning again to the enumeration of ‘Discoverers and Inventors’ in Book IV, Genius continues his list following the founding of ‘physiognomy’ with that of chroniclers and textual composers and compilers which ultimately calls to mind Gower’s opening statement at the beginning of the *Confessio* ‘of hem that writen us tofore’. He details the first ‘enditours / Of old cronique and ek auctours’ (CA, IV, 2411-12), presumably writing in the Hebrew and Greek languages, as ‘Cladyns, Esdras, and Sulpices, / Termegis, Pandulf, Frigidilles, Menander, Ephiloquorus, / Solins, Pandas, and Josephus’ (CA, IV, 2407-10).³⁶³ From Cham’s and Cadmus’ invention of the textual sign in their respective languages, evolves the science of reading the signs of nature, then the attempt to understand the signs of the occult, then the spurious science of physical sign reading called physiognomy, then the interpretation of the signs of the past and author’s whose knowledge serves as Gower’s sources and authority for his poem ‘ben tawht of that was write tho’ (CA, Prologue, 3). Genius then remarks that: ‘And Heredot in his science / Of metre, of rime, and of cadence, / The ferste was of which men note’ that Herodotus, the famous ancient Greek historian, was the founder of the poetic structures of metre, rhyme, and cadence. Peck notes that Herodotus was called ‘the father of history’ and was notable for ‘recording cultural events through observations of place and the construction of heroes, like Solon, Croesus, or Cleomenes’ and that he ‘was admired by Cicero, Lucius, and Quintillian for his sweet and beauteous style as well as his grandeur and emotional power’³⁶⁴, which may account for his poetic and literary placement in Genius’ inventory. However, Herodotus equally had many critics. Aristophanes satirised

³⁶³ Gower’s ‘enditours’ here are quite obscure and have not been completely successfully identified though Macaulay has found some similar names in Godfrey of Viterbo’s *Pantheon*. See note to CA IV 2396, *Works II*, p.508.

³⁶⁴ Russell Peck, ed., *Confessio Amantis*, Vol. 2, p.397.

him in his play *Acharnians*, Thucydides accused him of romanticizing the past and lacking the *gravitas* necessary for historical writing³⁶⁵, and he was charged with bias by Plutarch in his *On the Malice of Herodotus*. In *The Histories*, Herodotus frequently combined classical mythological tales with his historical accounts such as the legend of the kidnapping of Io, the abduction of Europa, the story of Jason and Medea, and Paris and Helen of Troy. This work also contains the myth of Arion and his kidnapping by pirates and subsequent rescue by a dolphin on hearing Arion's wonderful singing, which of course appears as the last exemplum in the Prologue to the *Confessio*. It is this conflation of myth and fact that drew the largest denunciation of Herodotus' work. Kenton L. Sparks remarks that 'in antiquity, Herodotus had acquired the reputation of being unreliable, biased, parsimonious in his praise of heroes, and mendacious'.³⁶⁶ Cicero in his work *De Legibus* I.5 writes that the works of Herodotus were 'innumerabiles fabulae', full of legends or 'fables' and his *De divinatione* (II.56, 116) accuses him of outright inventing a scene where Croesus of Lydia consults an oracle; Ctesias of Cnidus in his *Persica* called Herodotus a 'myth-monger'³⁶⁷; a slew of books sprang up contradicting the veracity of Herodotus' *Histories* such as Manetho's *Against Herodotus*, Valerius Pollio's *On Herodotus' Thefts*, Libanius' *Against Herodotus*, and Aelius Harpocration *On Herodotus' Lies*³⁶⁸; and Lucian of Samosata, mockingly attacked Herodotus as a liar in his great satire *Verae Historiae* going as far as to deny him a place among the famous on the Island of the Blessed.³⁶⁹ Cicero, who in *De legibus* had named Herodotus 'the father of history', nevertheless, in I.4, when discussing with his brother Quintus and Atticus the merits of his poem on Marius, remarks that truth was the domain of the historian and not the poet. Quintus asks in response if one set of rules should be observed with history and another with poetry. Cicero responds:

³⁶⁵ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Richard Crawley (London: J.M. Dent, 1910), i.22.

³⁶⁶ Kenton L. Sparks, *Ethnicity and Identity in Ancient Israel: Prolegomena to the Study of Ethnic Sentiments and their Expression in the Hebrew Bible*. (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1998), p.58.

³⁶⁷ John Marincola, *Greek Historians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p.59.

³⁶⁸ J.A.S. Evans, 'Father of History or Father of Lies: The Reputation of Herodotus', *The Classical Journal*, Vol. 64, No. 1 (Oct., 1968), 11-17 (p.14).

³⁶⁹ Lucian, *Works*, ed. and trans. A.M. Harmon (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1913), Vol. 1.

Quippe cum in illa ad ueritatem, Quinte, *quaeque* referantur, in hoc ad delectationem pleraque; quamquam et apud Herodotum patrem historiae et apud Theopompum sunt innumerabiles fabulae³⁷⁰.

[Certainly, inasmuch as the main object of the former is truth in all its relations, while that of the latter is pleasure; although in Herodotus, the father of Greek history, and in Theopompus, we find fables in great number.]³⁷¹

For Cicero, the historian should be bound by accuracy, which is what he disparages Herodotus for lacking. For the poet whose writing is for pleasure, however, there is no such obligation. And Gower, is perhaps, indirectly pointing to Herodotus' ambiguous reputation as fabulist, as a melder of fact and fiction instead of truthful historian by making Genius credit him with the tools and structure of poetry in Book IV.

As R.F. Yeager notes, 'Gower's stress on the aural elements of the 'science' of versification creates a neat bridge to music, his next topic'.³⁷² Of this, Genius writes:

And of musique also the note
In mannes vois, or softe or sharpe,
That fond Jubal; and of the harpe
The merie soun, which is to like,
That fond Poulins forth with physique (CA, IV, 2416-2420)

The myth of Arion equally forms a neat bridge between the previous section on Herodotus, who as we have noted included the legend in his *Histories*, and the invention of singing and harp playing which Arion was famed throughout the Greek world for. This section illustrates the amalgamation of instrument and voice at once recalling Gower's description of Arion in the Prologue as one 'Which hadde an harpe of such temprure, / And therto of so good mesure, / He song' (CA, Prologue, 1055-57). This, additionally,

³⁷⁰ Cicero, *De legibus*, 1.5, <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/cicero/leg1.shtml#5>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

³⁷¹ Cicero, *The Treatises of M.T. Cicero: On The Nature of the Gods, Fate, The Republic, Laws, etc.*, ed. and trans. D. Yonge, (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1853). I have changed the translation of *delectationem* from Yonge's 'amusement' to my 'pleasure' as I find it more fitting.

³⁷² R.F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: A Search for a New Arion*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990), p.164.

invokes Gower's section on rhetoric in Book VII, when Genius warns of the enchanting nature of language that 'Whan wordes medlen with the song / It doth pleasance wel the more' (CA, VII, 1586-87). Jubal, alongside Jabal and Tubalcain, was the son of Lamech. Lamech, descendant of Cain, was notorious for being a bigamist and a double murderer in the Genesis narrative 4:19-24. Fyler comments that 'Lamech's crime fittingly ties him, as the last in Cain's line, with Cain himself – both killers, but Lamech doubly guilty of parricide and infanticide, and to be punished not seven, but seventy-seven fold'.³⁷³ He writes further that:

There is a surprising analogue to Ovid's particular version of soft primitivism - the idea of progressive alienation and subdivision into categories - the opening chapters of Genesis: the division of *homo sapiens* into two sexes, the genealogies of Cain and Seth after the Fall, and most particularly, the account of Lamech the first bigamist and his children the inventors of the arts, all of them marked by division and categorization. Sexual duplicity and the arts of civilization are, for the Genesis commentators, closely linked; and when Chaucer refers to Lamech, he too uses bigamy and amorous deceit as a way of summing up moral decline, and identifying duplicity with division.³⁷⁴

Josephus remarks in his *Jewish Antiquities* of Lamech and his progeny that 'within Adam's lifetime, the descendants of Cain went to the depths of depravity, and inheriting and imitating one another's vices, each ended worse than the last'.³⁷⁵ The Middle English *Revelations* of Pseudo Methodius, which Gower cites as a source in Book VIII³⁷⁶, is unequivocal regarding Lamech's children and their evil inventions:

In þe CCC & XL^o zere of þe lif of Iareth, in þe secunde þousand of þe world, þere were men wicked doeris & fynderis of worst crafte of þe sones of Caym [Cain], & al vnclennesse & filþe, þat is Obal [Jubal] & Tubal, þat is to wite þe sones of Lameth þe blynde, which was þe first blynde man,

³⁷³ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.30.

³⁷⁴ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.66.

³⁷⁵ Flavius Josephus, *Jospehus: Jewish Antiquities Books I-IV*, ed. H. St. John Thackeray, Vol.4, Loeb Classical Library (London: Heinemann, 1930), I.1.2, p.31.

³⁷⁶ 'Metodre seith to this matiere, / As he be revelacioun' (CA, VIII, 48-49).

þat slow Caym. Þese fonden firste þe werkes of bras & iren, of gold & silver, & of grinding; and þei firste fonde alle þe artes of musik.³⁷⁷

Genesis 4:20 tells us that Jabal was ‘pater habitantium in tentoriis atque pastorum’ [father of such as dwell in tents, and of herdsmen] and in Genesis 4:21 that Jubal his brother was ‘pater canentium cithara et organo’ [father of them that play upon the harp and the organs]. In Genesis 4:22 Sella, one of Lamech’s two wives, gives birth to Tubalcain ‘qui fuit malleator et faber in cuncta opera aeris et ferri soror vero Thubalcain Noemma’ [who was a hammerer and artificer in every work of brass and iron. And the sister of Tubalcain was Noema]. Genius follows Genesis here writing, several lines after Jubal’s invention of music, that ‘Tubal in iren and in stel / Fond ferst the forge and wroght it wel’ (CA, IV, 2425-2426). On top of Jabal inventing the tent, Genius describes him as discovering nets and the art of fishing and hunting as well. This follows Godfrey of Viterbo’s *Pantheon* thus ushering in the carnivorous age of man:

And Jadahel [Jabal], as seith the bok
Ferst made net and fishes tok
Of huntynge ek he fond the chace,
Which now is knowe in many place.
A tente of cloth with corde and stake
He sette up ferst and dede it make (CA, IV, 2427-2432)

Following Peter Comestor, Ranulf Higden recounts the story of the brothers’ inventions:

Tubalcain fonde first smythes craft and grauyinge, and whan Tubalcain wrouzte in his smepes craft, Tubal [Jubal] hadde grete likynge to hire þe hameres sowne, and he fonde proporcious and acorde of melodye by wyghte in þe hameres, and so þey vsed hym moche in þe acorde of melodye, but he was nouzt fyndere of þe instrumentis of musik, ffor þey were i-fonde longe afterward. Here wise men telleþ þat þey Tubal vsede first musyk for to releue hym self while he as an herde, and kepe bestes,

³⁷⁷ Pseudo-Methodius, *þe Bygynning of þe World and þe Ende of Worlde*, trans. John Trevisa in *Dialogus inter militem et clericum*, ed. A. J. Perry, EET o.s. 167 (London: Oxford University Press, 1925), pp.94-112, p.96.

ffor all þat he was nouzt þe first fonde þe resoun of acorde in musyk by
wiztes, but Pittagoras fonde þat (2.5)³⁷⁸

The insistence of Genius on including the sons of Lamech, the line of Cain, in his account of the discovery of the arts taints the entire list and, as Fyler remarks regarding other medieval commentators who include Lamech's children in their record gives 'it a more sinister significance'.³⁷⁹

Nestled in between Jubal's discovery of music and Tubalcain's and Jabal's inventions, Genius writes:

Zenzis fond ferst the pourtreture,
And Prometheus the sculpture;
After what forme that hem thoghte,
The resemblance anon thei wroghte (CA, IV, 2421-2424)

Zeuxis (Zenzis), the celebrated Greek artist from Heraclea, is credited with being the first to paint portraiture here by Genius. Zeuxis' name can specifically be found in the *Le Roman de la Rose* when discussing the inability of artists to represent accurately the truth of reality or Nature in the instance below:

Mès ci ne péust-il riens faire
Zeuxis, tant séust bien peindre,
Ne colorer sa portraiture,
Tant est de grant biauté Nature,
Zeuxis, non pas trestuit li mestre
Que Nature fist onques nestre:
Car or soit que bien entendissent
Sa biauté toute, et tuit vosissent

³⁷⁸ Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon: Together with the English Translations of John Trevisa and of an Unknown Writer of the Fifteenth Century*, eds Churchill Babington and J.R. Lumby, Rolls Series 41. 9 vols. (London: Longman & Co., 1865-86), 2.5. *Tubal* and *Jubal* were commonly mixed up in the Middle Ages. Chaucer retells this story in *The Book of the Duchess* 'As koude Lamekes sone Tubal / That found out first the art of songe / For as hys brothres hamers ronge / Upon hys anvelt up and down, / Therof he took the firste soun / But Grekes seyn Pictagoras, / That he the firste fynder was / Of the art (Aurora telleth so) / But therof no fors of hem two' (BOD, 1162-1168).

³⁷⁹ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.32.

A tel portraiture muser,
Ains porroient lor mains user,
Que si très-grant biauté portraire;
Nus, fors Diex, ne le porroit faire, (RR, 16869-16880)

[But Nature's beauty is so great that Zeuxis could never have succeeded, for all his skill in executing and colouring his portrait. Zeuxis? No, nor all the masters that Nature ever bore. For even if they had grasped the extent of her beauty and wanted to waste their time trying to portray it, their hands would have worn out before they had managed to depict such very great loveliness. Only God could do it.]

Chaucer, follows *Le Roman de la Rose* in his Physician's Tale when he writes of the artists' inability to accurately capture Virginia's beauty and resemblance, which Nature had 'yformed hire in so greet excellence'(PhyT, 10) as if it is Nature saying :

'Lo! I, Nature,
Thus kan I forme and peynte a creature,
Whan that me list; who kan me countrefete?
Pigmalion noght, though he ay forge and bete,
Or grave, or peynte; for I dar wel seyn
Apelles, Zanzis, sholde werche in veyn
Outher to grave, or peynte, or forge, or bete,
If they presumed me to countrefete.' (PhyT, 11-18)

Here, Chaucer uses the word 'countrefete' twice in these short lines to denote the artists' attempts to signify the reality of Nature and a double use of the verb 'forge' appears, additionally, revealing that Chaucer is purposefully drawing particular attention to the artifice and falsification of painting, sculpture, and other craft-work. Gower's audience, no doubt, would have been familiar with the story of Zeuxis from *Le Roman de la Rose*, as would Chaucer's audience of the *Canterbury Tales*, and so his inclusion here only amplifies the idea that the representation of truth through signs and images is unattainable and is nothing short of fiction.

Following Lamech's children, Tubalcain and Jabal, Genius tells us that:

The craft Minerve of wolle fond
And made cloth hire oghne hond
And Delbora made it of lyn:
Tho wommen were of great engyn (CA, IV, 2435-2438)

He mixes biblical narrative with mythology, here, describing Minerva, the Roman goddess of wisdom, as founder of the craft of wool-making. In Book V, Genius recounts the story of Minerva to ‘whom the Greks obeie and serve’ (CA, V, 1190), who was originally called Pallas/Athena (CA, V, 1199). Minerva is attributed in Book V with ‘the cloth making of wolle and lyn’ and Virgil in his *Aeneid* writes that the Greeks ‘iam labentibus annis instar montis equum divina Palladis arte aedificant, sectaque intexunt abiete costas’³⁸⁰ [built a giant of a wooden horse, making its flanks from a trellis of sawn firwood. The craftsmanship was divinely inspired by Minerva]. In the preceding Book IV in the passage above Genius curiously credits Minerva with wool-making and Delbora, the wife of Abel, with the discovery of linen-making. Delbora, as Gower points out in Book VIII, is one of the daughters of Eve (CA, VIII, 64-66), who committed incest with her brother Abel as did her sister Calmana with her other brother Cain (CA, VIII, 70-72).³⁸¹ Keith Glaeske writes that ‘Gower's designation of Delbora as the inventor of weaving remains puzzling’.³⁸² Tubalcain’s sister Noema is more usually credited with the invention of linen-making and the art of parti-colored weaving. Of course, it was Eve who was the first discoverer of weaving, which began with the creation of the fig leaves for herself and Adam. As Eric Jager notes ‘as a material artefact produced in part by human labour, Scripture was of a piece with the primal human clothing of “leaves” and “skins” , emblems for how the Fall had covered God’s truth and made necessary a written revelation in the first place’.³⁸³ Indeed, he writes further that ‘in allegorizing the fig leaf episode in Genesis 3, patristic authors had forged a special link between verbal and sexual consequences of the Fall, turning the leaves into emblems for the urge to dissemble sexual desire, sin , and guilt. For example, Ambrose had said that the sinner “wants to cover

³⁸⁰ Virgil, *Aeneid*, <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/vergil/aen2.shtml>> [accessed September 29th 2017], Book II, lines 14-15.

³⁸¹ On Gower’s naming of the daughters of Eve and his possible sources see Keith Glaeske, ‘Gower and the Daughters of Eve’, *SELIM: Journal of the Spanish Society for Medieval English Language and Literature*, 19 (2014), 161-74.

³⁸² Glaeske, ‘Daughters of Eve’, p.170.

³⁸³ Jager, *The Tempter’s Voice*, p.244.

himself with fig leaves, sewing together, as it were, insubstantial and shady words ... in order to make a veil for his genitals and to cover his own awareness of the deed”³⁸⁴. As my exemplum from *Le Roman de la Rose* showed in the Introduction, fig leaves are an integument, which indicative of the state of all post-lapsarian language. Minerva and Delbora’s discovery of wool and linen weaving goes beyond Eve’s necessity for mere concealment and becomes about clothes-making for ornamentation and decoration. With weaving’s close connection in the Middle Ages, as we have seen, with textual production and words, Minerva and Delbora’s art can symbolically be linked to Gower’s section on rhetoric in Book VII and his ‘pulcra sermonis’ designed for embellishment and appearance rather than truth.

John Fyler writes of the medieval commentators that ‘each of the arts [...] manifests division and subdivision, marking a universal lapse from innocent unreflecting identity to duplicity and alienation, and mirroring the separation of word from thing in the fallen world’³⁸⁵ and so far this is a more than apposite description to apply to Genius’ catalogue of inventors and discoverers in Book IV. For Genius, the origin of all art begins with a textual sign. From there all subsequent signs are produced and with it semiotic misrepresentation and manipulation as outlined throughout this whole section.

THE TREACHERY OF GREEK SIGNS

The idea of the treacherous Greeks particularly as progenitors and practitioners of linguistic and semiotic fraud is not without precedent. Virgil writes of Sinon, that ‘False dissymulour’ (NPT, 3228), who enticed the Trojans through deceit to accept the gift of the Trojan horse: ‘accipe nunc Danaum insidias et crimine ab uno disce omnis’³⁸⁶ [You are now to hear how the Greeks tricked us. From this one proof of their perfidy you may understand them all].³⁸⁷ Virgil argues, then, that all Greeks are mendacious fraudsters. One can learn of all Greeks by examining the actions of just one, Sinon. In particular, the character of Ulysses is singled out as being not only representative of Greek treachery but also linguistic manipulation. As we have seen in the previous chapter, Gower links Ulysses to rhetoric and many instances of deceit. In Book VII, he writes that it was his ‘eloquence and his facounde’ that instigated one of the most destructive episodes in

³⁸⁴ Jager, *The Tempter’s Voice*, p.217.

³⁸⁵ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.33.

³⁸⁶ Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book II, line 65, <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/vergil/aen2.shtml>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

³⁸⁷ Virgil, *The Aeneid*, trans. W.F. Jackson Knight (London: Penguin, 1960).

literary history - the Fall of Troy. Homer and the Greek dramatists habitually describe Ulysses as ‘crafty’ with specific reference to his involvement in the ruse of the wooden horse and Virgil, in his *Aeneid*, similarly depicts him as deceitful (‘pellacis Vlixī’ 2.90). And in the *Ilias Latina*, a short Latin hexameter version of the *Iliad* of Homer, his epithet is ‘commentor fraudis’ [deviser of deceits, 527, 279].³⁸⁸ Teolinda Barolini remarks that ‘The Ulysses of the *Aeneid* came to dominate the Latin and later medieval tradition, producing the conventional stereotype of a treacherous and sacrilegious warrior that leads directly to Dante’s fraudulent counsellor’.³⁸⁹ Indeed, Dante places Ulysses in the eighth circle of *Inferno*, reserved for the fraudulent, engulfed in a fiery prison in the eighth bolgia (Canto XXVI), where the false counsellors reside. He is alongside Diomedes, who colluded with Ulysses to beguile Achilles into joining them in war, concealing the prophecy of his death. Both were complicit in the theft of the sacred image of Pallas, which the safety of Troy relied on, as well as the conceit of the wooden horse.

Ovid’s assessment of Ulysses is no more positive. In *Metamorphoses* he writes that Ajax says that Ulysses is ‘sanguine cretus / Sisyphio’, a blood-relative of Sisyphus (punished for his craftiness and deceitfulness by being forced to eternally push a rock up hill) and ‘furtisque et fraude simillimus illi’ [is similar to him in his thievery and fraud] (13.31-32). He, like Gower, also links Ulysses to the art of rhetoric writing that ‘Qui licet eloquio fidum quoque Nestora vincat’ [he surpasses even Nestor in eloquence] (13.63) and several lines later writes, via Ajax, that Ulysses is one ‘qui clam, qui semper inermis / rem gerit et furtis incautum decipit hostem’ [who always goes about his business stealthily, unarmed, and deceives the unsuspecting enemy by tricks] (13.103-104). Indeed, all classical and medieval writers agree that Ulysses’ most dangerous and destructive weapon is his tongue. Benoît de Sainte Maure’s *Roman de Troie*, a source for Gower who mentions reading ‘the bok of Troie’ (CA, VII, 1559) in his Ulyssean section on ‘Rethorique’, writes of ‘Ulixès’ thus:

Mervailles esteit beaus parliers,
 Mais en dis mile chevaliers
 N’en aveit un plus tricheor:
 Ja veir ne deist a nul jor;

³⁸⁸ Kathryn L. McKinley, ed, ‘The Medieval Homer: The *Ilias Latina*’, *Allegorica*, 19 (1998), 3-61.

³⁸⁹ Teodolinda Barolini, ‘Ulysses’ in *The Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. Richard Lansing (New York and London: Garland, 2000), p.842.

De sa boch isseit granz gabeis (5205-09)³⁹⁰

[He was marvellous in speech, but among ten thousand knights there was none more deceitful: he at no time told the truth; from his mouth came great tricks]³⁹¹

Benoît describes Antenor, the betrayer of the city of Troy to the Greeks, as ‘li cuiverz Judas’ [miserable Judas] (26135) connecting him to the most treacherous episode in Christian history. Dante continues this association and places both Antenor and Judas in the ninth circle and the deepest, darkest circle of *Inferno* reserved for the treacherous to kindred and country.

Gower, additionally, takes the view of the treacherous Greek but, as we have already seen places a particular focus on semiotic fraud and misrepresentation. Aside from his explication of how Ulysses’ ‘goodly wordes’ (CA, VII, 1561) convinced Antenor to sell ‘the toun which he with tresoun wan’ (CA, VII, 1563) in his section on ‘Rethorique’, he also includes, in the *Confessio*, the ‘Tale of Nauplus and Ulysses’, where ‘Uluxes’ devises a clever stratagem and counterfeits the signs of madness (‘feigneth to be wod’ CA, IV, 1833) so as to persuade Nauplus into letting him shirk his masculine duties of war. In Book III, on Wrath, Genius recounts the ‘Tale of Namplus [Nauplus] and the Greeks’ and in a preceding Latin epigram Gower makes a connection between the sin of anger and misrepresentation of the verbal sign suggesting one is complicit in causing the other. Here, Gower plays on Virgil’s ‘omnia vincit amor’ [love conquers all] (Eclogue X, line 69)³⁹², as he has done so many times before throughout all his poetical works, when he writes that only a silent mouth can conquer all:

Ira mouet litem, que lingue frena resoluens
Laxa per infames currit vbique vias.
Rixarum nutrix quos educat ista loquaces,
Hos Venus a latere linquit habere vagos.
Set patienter agens taciturno qui celet ore,

³⁹⁰ Benoît de Sainte Maure, *Roman de Troie*, ed. Léopold Constans, 6 Vols, Société des anciens textes français (Paris: Firmin Didot, 1904-1912).

³⁹¹ Translation my own.

³⁹² Virgil, *The Eclogues*, trans. Guy Lee (Middlesex: Penguin, 1984).

Vincit, et optati carpit amoris iter. (CA, III, ii)

[Wrath stirs up conflict, which, released and loosening the tongue's reins, runs everywhere through the paths of infamy. The nursemaid of quarrels, she informs those chatterers, and Venus releases them from her side to be wanderers. But he who deals patiently and keeps things concealed with a silent mouth conquers, and he follows the path of a desired love.]

And, in the Latin heading that directly precedes Genius' 'Tale of Namplus and the Greeks' Gower makes an explicit link between the textual sign and the sin of anger: 'Demonis est odium quasi Scriba, cui dabit Ira / Materiam scripti cordi ad antra sui' [Hatred is like the devil's scribe, to whom Wrath will give the substance of the inscription for the heart's inner sanctum] (CA, III, iii).

In this particular tale, Genius tells us that in the aftermath of the destruction of Troy of which 'The Gregois [...] of al this thing / Ben cause' (CA, III, 976-7), the Greek warriors are returning home by boat when they encounter an enormous and life-threatening storm. Genius introduces King Namplus, a Greek King and Argonaut, whose son Palamedes was 'be tresoun overcast' and tragically killed at Troy. Genius does not go into detail on Palamedes' death but Gower's audience would be extremely familiar with the story from Virgil's account in the *Aeneid* as well as in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Virgil recounts simply that Palamedes' death came about 'invidia postquam pellacis Ulixi' [through the jealous deceit of Ulysses] (II. 90). And Ovid writes a lengthier account of his death, which details Ulysses' fraud thus:

ille tamen vivit, quia non comitavit Ulixem;
mallet et infelix Palamedes esse relictus,
[viveret aut certe letum sine crimine haberet]
quem male convicti nimium memor iste furoris
prodere rem Danaam finxit fictumque probavit
crimen et ostendit, quod iam praefoderat, aurum.
ergo aut exilio vires subduxit Achivis,
aut nece: sic pugnat, sic est metuendus Ulixes! (XVIII, 55-62)

[But Ulysses remembering all too clearly how the other had shamed him by exposing his pretended madness, trumped up a charge that Palamedes was betraying the Greek cause and, in proof of the crime he had himself invented, produced gold which he had previously buried on the spot. So, by exile or by death, he undermined the strength of the Greeks. This is the way Ulysses fights, this is what you have to fear from him.]

Thus, through lies, deceit, fraud and 'tresoun' (the antonym of truth) Palamedes, King Namplus' son, was slain by his fellow Greeks. For this reason, Namplus harboured a 'privé hate' (CA, III, 1015) against the renowned Greeks. He witnessed their trouble at sea and 'knew the tydes of the flod, / And sih the wynd blew to the lond' (CA, III, 1024-25) and so 'A gret deceipte anon he fond' (CA, III, 1026). The King knew that the weather was not about to change and that the Greeks must hold their course which would bring them to the borders of his land. In the darkness of the night he made a 'Gret fyr agein the rockes / To schewe upon the helles hihe / So that the flete of Grece it sihe' (CA, III, 1034-36). The ruse worked. The Greeks interpret the fire as a signal of safe harbour, believing that the 'fyr was mad for goode' (CA, III, 1042). But alas, as Genius painfully points out 'In Semblant, as mein sein, is guile' (CA, III, 1045). External signs are deceitful and are not accurate significations of that which is within.

The ship turned towards the false sign of the great fire, thinking it would get help but instead hit the sharp rocks and 'drof al to pieces' (CA, III, 1048) killing everyone on board. The ships coming behind observed what happened and managed to turn around and escape just in time. Hence, it was a Ulyssean deceitful stratagem that caused the death of Palamedes and now another Greek semiotic manipulation has destructive and fatal consequences. Genius advises Amans, after the tale, to be wary of deception and, in so doing, makes a firm connection between fraud and the textual sign, between the scribe and his tools.

Mi sone, hierof thou miht advise
How fraude stant in many wise
Amonges hem that guile thenke;
Ther is no scrivein with his enke
Which half the fraude wryte can
That stant in such a maner man

Forthi the wise men ne demen

The thinges after that thei semen (CA, III, 1067-1074)

Genius warns Amans not to judge a book by its cover, not to take signs at face value (making no distinction here between the textual sign which has been introduced through the image of the scribe and his ink, the verbal sign, and the physical/natural sign). Indeed, Genius makes a point to say that a man's character and position cannot be determined simply by his outward appearance 'Schal no man knowe be his chere / Which is avant, ne which arere' (CA, III, 1079-78). 'Visage' and 'corage', external and internal, do not correspond to each other.

With the break in word and deed, signifier and signified, the Greeks were subject to misunderstanding as well as misrepresenting the sign in Gower's work. In Book I, which details the sin of Pride, in a section detailing the vulnerability of the senses of sight and sound, Genius uses the exemplum of Ulysses and the Sirens to illustrate this point. 'The Tale of Sirens' follows the opening 'Tale of Acteon' and the setting for this section, as outlined above, begins with the reign of Cadmus the founder of the Greek alphabet. Genius purports to retell the story directly from 'tale of Troie' (CA, I, 483) describing the Sirens as 'monstres' (CA, I, 485) and:

Of body bothe and of visage

Lik unto wommen of yong age

Up fro the navele on hih thei be,

And doun benethe, as men mai se,

Thei bere of fishes the figure. (CA, I, 487-491)

The Sirens become the 'monstres' of hypocrisy representing, on the surface, beautiful figures of young women but lurking underneath lie the deformed shapes of sea-creatures. Genius finds that not only the Sirens' faces, their visual signs, are deceptive but their voices, the verbal signs, are also untrustworthy:

Thei ben, that with so swete a stevene

Lik to the melodie of hevene

In wommanysshe vois thei singe,

With notes of so gret likinge,

Of such mesure, of such musike,
Wherof the schipes thei beswike (CA, I, 493-498)

Genius lays emphasis on the sweetness, the beauty, the mellifluous sounds emanating from the Sirens' mouths, a description that has more than a passing resemblance to his section on 'Rethorique' and the idea of 'pulcra sermonis' that lack the truth within. These honeyed voices are interpreted by the Greeks as 'lik the melodie of hevene' and, as in the 'Tale of Namplus and the Greeks', they believe the message encapsulated in music 'of such mesure' to only be truthful and good. The Greeks misunderstand fully the beauty of the external visual sign and verbal sign. Genius points out their upside down interpretation 'Thei wene it be a paradys, / Which after is to hem an helle' (CA, I, 502-503). The Greeks foolishly believed the Sirens' appearance and voices to offer a paradise, but instead they are presented with hell. They are seduced from their course, with disastrous consequences, crashing their boats and thus are slain by the 'monstres' that now fully reveal themselves. It is left up to 'crafty' Ulysses to devise a stratagem to help his sailors escape the dreaded Sirens. He instructs his navy to have their ears 'stoppede alle faste / That non of hem mai here hem singe' (CA, I, 522-3). Ulysses' trick here, to become deaf to the verbal sign as the only way to defeat deceit, is in a way a type of silence as advocated by Augustine and Gower in his Latin head-piece above on Wrath when he remarks that 'silence will conquer all'. Genius concludes this tale by advising Amans to 'Be wel war, and gif no credence, / Bot if thou se more evidence' (CA, I, 533-4); to not believe everything you see is truth without demanding further proof of such. This serves to underscore further the idea of the ambiguous and unreliable sign.

In the next section, which personifies Hypocrisy, Gower writes in part of its Latin head-piece:

Laruando faciem ficto pallore subornat
Fraudibus Ypocrisis mellea verba suis.
Sicque pios animos quamsepe ruit muliebres
Ex humili verbo sub latitante dolo. (CA, I, v.)

[By masking the face with a fictional pallor, Hypocrisy adorns his frauds with honey words. And thus time and again he overwhelms pious,

womanly souls by means of humble speech with deceit hidden underneath.]

Hypocrisy, for Gower, once again, has a semiotic component, that is both verbal and physical, to it. A fictional face and fictional words are associated, but here with a larger emphasis on the verbal sign. Gower not only suggests that ‘mellea verba’ [honeyed words] can conceal fraud but additionally declares that ‘humili verbo’ [humble speech] can hide lies. ‘Humili verbo’ has a very specific connotation in the Middle Ages. ‘Sermo humilis’ was a plain or ordinary speech most often categorized by the lack of any conscious use of rhetoric. It was, nonetheless, one of the three skilled styles of rhetoric and was a phrase invented by Cicero.³⁹³ Augustine discusses its function in *De doctrina Christiana* and ‘plain’ is how Gower’s *Confessio* is consistently stylistically labelled. C.S. Lewis famously wrote that Gower ‘is our first considerable master of the plain style in poetry, and he has the qualities and defects that go with such a style’.³⁹⁴ John Burrow writes that ‘Gower’s plain style is often not so much plain as threadbare’.³⁹⁵ The narrator of Book I, regarding the ‘wonder hap which me befell’ (CA, I, 67), promises that he will ‘pleinly for to telle it oute’ (CA, I, 71). And Genius himself claims to only have used ‘plain speech’ throughout all his tales and dialogue with Amans. Therefore, Gower’s declaration that ‘humili verba’ have the potential to conceal fraud raises suspicions for the truthfulness of Gower’s own poem and indeed the veracity of his fictional narrator. Here he introduces doubt regarding these issues. Furthermore, in his *Vox Clamantis* IV, xxii, (1065-71), Gower links hypocrisy again to the verbal and textual sign but, in this passage, connects hypocrisy to poetry through the metallurgic images of outward gold and inward lead - fraudulent alchemy:

Ypocritamaque notat, qui simulando volat

³⁹³ Gillian Clark, *Augustine: The Confessions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p.71. See also ‘sermo humilis’ in *Literary Language and its Public in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965), pp.27-52.

³⁹⁴ C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936, repr. 2013), pp.250-51.

³⁹⁵ J.A. Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry: Chaucer, Gower, Langland, and the ‘Gawain’ Poet* (London: Routledge & K. Paul, 1971), p.3. See also Götz Schmitz ‘Rhetoric and Fiction’. The ‘plain style’ was advocated in penitential manuals and was important in confession, see Robert Mannyng of Brunne’s *Handlyng Synne*, ed. Frederick J. Furnivall (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trüber & Co., Limited, 1901), 11765.

Aurea facta foras similans ypocrita fingit
 Set mala mens intus plumbea vota gerit:
 Sunt etenim multi tales qui verba colorant
 Qui pascunt aures, aurea verba sonant,
 Verbis frondescunt, set nonest fructus in actu,
 Simplicium mentes dulce loquendo mouent
 Set templum domini tales excludit, abhorret
 Verborum phaleras, verba polita fugit.
 Scripta poetarum, que sermo pictus inaurat,
 Aurea dicuntur lingua, set ill caue.

[In like manner, the hypocrite outwardly feigns deeds of gold, but inwardly his wicked mind entertains wishes of lead. Indeed, there are many such, who colour their words, stuff our ears, and utter aureate speeches. They are flowery in their talk, but there is no fruit in their action. They sway the minds of the naïve by speaking sweetly. But the temple of the Lord shuts out such men, abhors the trappings of their speeches, and shuns their smooth talk. Poets' writings, which painted language gilds over, are rendered with a golden tongue, but beware of them.]

To illustrate Hypocrisy in the *Confessio*, which the *MED* defines as the sin of pretending to be what one is not³⁹⁶, Gower once again turns to the 'treacherous Greeks'. Genius recounts the tale of the 'Trojan Horse' and describes the Greeks as 'hem that ben so derk withinne' (CA, I, 1077) alluding to the dual nature of good exterior and shadowy interior. This description of the Greeks and their conflicting qualities comes at the beginning of the tale, therefore, giving a full indication of how the audience are to subsequently interpret them in this story. It also foreshadows the perfidious duality of inner and outer of the 'Trojan Horse' itself. Genius continues that these Greeks 'hath betrayed' (CA, I, 1079) through hypocrisy the town of 'Troie' (CA, I, 1078). This betrayal came, unsurprisingly, in the form of a deceitful 'vice feigned of simplesece / Thurgh sleighte of Calcas and Crise' (CA, I, 1084-85). Genius accentuates the deceitful nature of the whole affair early on with the terms suggesting criminal subterfuge such as 'vice',

³⁹⁶ *MED* 'ipocrisi (e)' n.

‘feigned’ and ‘sleyhte’ all occurring in quick succession. The city was ‘wan be such a maner wise / An hors of bras thei let do forge, / Of such entaile, of such a forge / That in this world was nevere man / That such an other werk began’ (CA, I, 1086-90). Genius’ *riche rime* of the word ‘forge’ intensifies the artifice of the horse. The verb ‘forgen’ means to form or fashion something, particularly to shape through metal³⁹⁷ but comes with connotations of deceit having the meaning of composing a false tale³⁹⁸ and that of counterfeiting something.³⁹⁹ Gower plays on these two senses of the word, as well as his audience’s pre-knowledge of the tale. Genius narrates a story of a ‘hors of bras’ rather than a wooden one which Peck remarks is ‘an unusual detail, given the prominence of the wooden horse in the myth in Virgil’.⁴⁰⁰ Gower deviates from his classical sources and more likely follows Guido delle Colonne’s *Historia destructionis Troiae* which also includes this unique aspect of the horse of brass. Brass is an alloy, an artificial and man-made metal consisting of two metals, copper and zinc, combined. By including a ‘hors of bras’, Genius amplifies the conceit’s duplicity through the dual nature of the metal and, moreover, by removing its wooden nature, a link to the natural world, Genius accentuates further the horse’s artifice. Ittai Weinryb notes that in the Middle Ages:

The making of an alloy involves the combination of ingredients. The alloy is in effect something of an oxymoron: multiple elements form a single final object. Essentially, an alloy is a metonymy of the esoteric nature of the craft of its generation. The existence of the alloy suggests an interest in alchemy, the ability to substitute material and transform matter. [...] In order to produce images, one has to imitate nature by making alloys. In order to imitate nature, one therefore participates in a practice whose goal is an unnatural product that is not in any way elemental. The alloy is an admixture that cannot become anything more than a combination of materials and will never be natural and elementary. Thus, image making with alloys leads to results that are always fictional or false.⁴⁰¹

³⁹⁷ *MED* ‘forgen’ v. (1) a, (2) a.

³⁹⁸ *MED* ‘forgen’ v. (3) a.

³⁹⁹ *MED* ‘forgen’ v. (5).

⁴⁰⁰ Russell Peck, ed., *Confessio Amantis*, Vol. 1, p.266.

⁴⁰¹ Ittai Weinryb, *The Bronze Object in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), pp.36-7.

Likewise, brass has an outer appearance similar to gold and can easily be mistaken for it but, crucially, it does not possess the qualities internally and contains many impurities and therefore is of considerably less value. Brass, in effect, as a metal represents the medieval understanding of ‘ipocrisie’ by simulating something that it is not. And this is certainly very close to Gower’s own understanding of hypocrisy in his *Vox Clamantis*.

The idea of a fictional, artificial mechanism is again emphasised by Genius’ lines ‘That such an other werk began / The crafti werkman Epius / It made’ (CA, I, 1090-92) where ‘werk’ has an internal rhyme. ‘Werk’, while having the common meaning of an artistic product⁴⁰² also has a less frequent sense of an arcane art but more specifically the art of alchemy or the alchemical process.⁴⁰³ This is exactly how Gower uses ‘werk’ in Book IV in his alchemical passage ‘Bot what man that this werk beginne’ (CA, IV, 2510). Genius continues the tale, telling Amans, that the Greeks sought ‘to beguile’ (CA, I, 1093) the King of Troy, ‘Anthenor and with Enee’ (CA, I, 1095) who were the King’s ‘of couseil the wiseste / The richeste and the myhtieste’ (CA, I, 1097-98). But of course, appearances can be deceiving and it is this exact counsel that turns out to be entirely false. In a dangerously secret and ‘privé place’ (CA, I, 1099) the Trojans agree to meet with the Greeks who ‘With fair behest and giftes grete / Of gold, that thei hem have engine / Togedre; and whan thei be covined, / Thei feignen for to make a pes’ (CA, I, 1099-1103). The Greeks manage to isolate the King of Troy away from prying eyes and the idea of sub rosa dealings is brought out with the word ‘privé’ which is further amplified by the word ‘covined’⁴⁰⁴ and its close proximity in sound and etymology in Middle English to the word ‘covine’ meaning a secret plan or a fraud or deceit⁴⁰⁵. This is the same word Gower uses to describe the famous Catiline conspirators in his section on rhetoric (CA, VII, 1602).

The Greeks overwhelm the Trojans with gifts of gold and pleasantries and pretend to offer a peace pact. But ‘under that’ (CA, I, 1104), beneath the surface of the peace accord, the Greeks ‘schopen the destruccioun / Bothe of the kyng and of the toun’ (CA, I, 1105-6). The plan works and the ‘false pees’ (CA, I, 1107) is accepted. Unable to defeat the Trojans by force, the Greeks intend to subdue them instead by dissembling. Genius explains ‘That sleihte scholde helpe thanne; / And of an ynche a large spanne / Be colour

⁴⁰² *MED* ‘werk’ n (1), 8 (a) (b) (c) (d) (e).

⁴⁰³ *MED* ‘werk’ n (1), 10 (a) (b).

⁴⁰⁴ ‘Covined’ comes from the Anglo-Norman ‘covenir’ v. meaning to come together/to agree and is etymologically related to ME ‘covine’ both sharing the same Latin root ‘convenire’ to convene.

⁴⁰⁵ *MED* ‘covine’ n, (3) (4).

of the pees thei made, / And tolden how thei weren glade / Of that thei stonden in acord' (CA, I, 1111-14). The Greeks made a 'spanne' out of an 'ynch, in other words they entirely fabricated the appearance of peace, 'the colour of pees', and falsely declared of their happiness regarding the false pact. Genius reinforces the point of artifice by describing the pact through imagery of crafting, not only through his use of the verb 'schopen' (CA, I, 1105) meaning to artisanally construct, build or create an object⁴⁰⁶, but also through textilic imagery with the illustration of somehow enlarging a smaller piece of fabric (an 'inch' and 'span' forms part of a tradesmen's terminology for specific lengths), further covering, concealing, and enhancing it externally through the use of dyes and colour. The idea of 'colour' as denoting appearance, in particular false appearance, links to Gower's section on 'rethorique' in Book VII and the 'colours of rhetoric' as well as alluding to masking the face with coloured make-up. Indeed, the imagery moves from crafting, artifice, fabrications, and colouring directly to that of false speech as the Greeks 'tolden' (CA, I, 1114) the Trojans how delighted they were to have this peace deal with them.

Genius then shifts to the textual sign telling us that 'it schal ben of record'(CA, I, 1116), at once reminding the audience of the textual source, that the Greeks 'seiden'(CA, I, 1117) to the Trojan King that 'be weie of love'(CA, I, 1118) they wished to offer a sacrifice to Minerva, the goddess of wisdom, so as 'the pes to kepe in good entente' (CA, I, 1121). Under the dishonest guise of 'love' and 'religious observation', the unwitting Antenor and Aeneas counsel the King to accept the sacrifice which leads Genius to lament 'So was the pleine trowthe blent / Through contrefet Ipocrisie' (CA, I, 1126-27). Truth is obscured⁴⁰⁷ with the 'hors of bras' that had been 'faire dihte' (CA, I, 1131). 'Dihte' from the Middle English verb 'dighten' meaning something prepared⁴⁰⁸ or constructed⁴⁰⁹, again, helps to underline the artisanal and artificial aspect to the horse as well as to the Greeks, themselves, throughout this tale. Moreover, 'dighten' comes from the Latin root 'dictare' a verb simultaneously meaning to dictate to a writer or scribe⁴¹⁰ or a written composition⁴¹¹, and both senses are still present in the Middle English form.⁴¹² This parent sense of the word serves to further emphasise the underlying textual and verbal

⁴⁰⁶ *MED* 'shapen' v. (2).

⁴⁰⁷ *MED* 'blenden' v (1), (3) (a).

⁴⁰⁸ *MED* 'dighten' v. (1) (a) (b).

⁴⁰⁹ *MED* 'dighten' v. (3) (a).

⁴¹⁰ *DMBLS* 'dictare' v. (1).

⁴¹¹ *DMBLS* 'dictare' v. (2).

⁴¹² *MED* 'dighten' v. (3) (b).

deceit at the heart of the story. Genius continues recounting how the ‘hors of bras’ ‘was to sen a wonder sihte’ (CA, I, 1132), highlighting its great visual power, and that ‘it was trapped of himselve, / And hadde of smale whieles twelve, / Upon the whiche men ynow / With craft toward the toun it drowe, / And goth glistrende agein the sune’ (CA, I, 1133-36). Here, the horse’s technical prowess, its trap-doors and wheels, is brought to the fore and the brass is then likened visually to gold when described as resplendent and glistening in the sunlight. This prefigures the purity and value with which the Trojans will view the gift erroneously.

Genius reiterates the Trojan’s semiotic misinterpretation ‘Thei of the toun which understode / That al this thing was do for goode’ (CA, I, 1149-50). The Trojans believed the horse to be ‘an evidence / Of love and pes for everemo’ (CA, I, 1160-61) and let it be brought into the city. The Greeks take their leave and go to their ships ‘and crossen seil and hem yare / Anon as thogh thei wolden fare’ (CA, I, 1165-66). They go to great lengths to hoist their sails up as signs of their immanent departure but under the obscurity of night they instead return back to land. Sinon, that most treacherous Greek of all, had been taken in by the Trojans and convinced them that he was on their side, but had really installed himself as a spy ‘as was conspired, / Whan time was a tokne hath fired’ (CA, I, 1173-74). Sinon lit a fire as a sign, a semiotic device, to communicate to those Greeks waiting outside the town. It was a sign telling them, and the Greek army that were hidden inside the ‘hors of bras’, that the stage was set for them to enter the town. The Greeks observe this secret sign of treachery and come en masse into Troy where they massacre all the Trojans and eventually burn the whole city to the ground. Genius laments:

And thus cam out the tricherie,
Which under fals Ypocrisie,
Was hid, and thei that wende pees
Tho myhten finde no rele
Of thilke swerd which al devoureth (CA, I, 1185-89)

Genius turns to imagery of the tongue in his summation to Amans and the short ‘moralitas’ he offers to his tale. He says ‘Ful ofte and thus the swete soureth, / Whan it is knowe to the tast’ (CA, I, 1190-1191) and swiftly moves from lingual to linguistic in the next lines ‘He spilleth many a word in wast / That schal with such a people trete / For whan he weneth most begete / Thanne is he schape most to lese’ (CA, I, 1192-1195).

Genius combines the dichotomy of sweet and sour with that of fortune's wheel and the opposing states of weal and woe. Genius' final advice to Amans stresses the linguistic and semiotic 'And riht so if a womman chese / Upon the wordes that sche hiereth / Som man, whan he most trewe appiereth, / Thanne is he forthest fro the trowthe' (CA, I, 1196-99). Appearance and reality, word and deed, signifier and signified have no relation to each other and truth is inevitably 'blent' and purposefully obfuscated in his final decree.

CARMENTE'S 'FERST LETTRES OF LATIN'

In a section coming after a protracted passage on 'Alchemy' but still part of Genius' list of inventors he tells us:

Bot toward oure marches here,
Of the Latins if thou wolt here,
Of hem that whilom virtuous
Were and therto laborious,
Carmente made of hire engine
The ferst lettres of Latin,
Of which the tunge Romein cam (CA, IV, 2633-2639)

This section, which develops from the origin of the Hebrew and Greek textual signs, details how later the Latin textual sign is discovered. Genius credits Carmente with the founding of the Latin alphabet. Carmenta, from Roman mythology, was Evander's wife said to be the goddess of childbirth and prophecy. Hyginus in his *Fabulae* writes that she was the mother of Cadmus who brought an alphabet of fifteen letters based on Cadmus' Greek alphabet to the Latins, thus directly linking the two languages.⁴¹³ Martianus Capella derives her name from *carmen* (a song or prophetic chant) because she 'got her name from the songs she poured out as prophesies'⁴¹⁴ a word which forms the Latin root for the English word 'charm' accentuating her relationship with the occult/magic. This is furthered by Genius' choice of the word 'engin' to describe her textual innovation. Scott Lightsey writes that the 'Latin *engin*, during this period [late 14th century] carried a number of denotations related to deceptive tactics and to the concealment of motivating

⁴¹³ Gaius Julius Hyginus, *Fabulae*, trans. Mary Grant in *The Myths of Hyginus* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1960), CCLXXVII.

⁴¹⁴ Russell Peck, ed., *Confessio Amantis*, p.404.

factors, both conceptual and mechanistic'.⁴¹⁵ 'Engin' is derived from the Latin *ingenium* meaning (a) a person's character or disposition; (b) their intellect; (c) a machine; (d) as well as denoting a clever trick or ruse.⁴¹⁶ In Anglo-Norman 'engin' came to mean (a) native wit; (b) ingenuity; (c) cunning; (d) fraud or deceit; (e) and a tool.⁴¹⁷ In Middle English 'engin', coming from the Old French, had a similar semantic range of (a) native intelligence; (b) deceitfulness or trickery; (c) design; (d) or a machine. Gower predominantly uses 'engin' and its derivatives in the *Confessio* to mean a scheme or a cunning deceit, the other times simply to describe a weapon or technical device.⁴¹⁸ In Benoît's *Roman de Troie* he uses the term 'engin' overwhelmingly to describe the deception and treachery of the Greeks. He writes that King Peleus takes great pains to deceive Jason 'Mout se penot de l'engigner' (760); of Jason and Hercules who pursue the Golden Fleece he writes that they intend to do it '[p]ar engine e par traïson' [by deceit and treason] (157); when Jason promises to marry Medea and then breaks his oath and deserts her it is described as 'Trop l'engigna' [through deceit] (2039); when the Greeks cunningly pretend to the Trojans that they are leaving by ship but return under the darkness of night it is also described as 'engeigné' [a trick] (6979); Ulysses is given the epithet 'reis Ulixés l'engignous' [the crafty Ulysses] (24546); when the Greeks are celebrating the false peace pact between them and the Trojans the narrator exclaims 'He! Las! Cum se sunt engignié! / Comunement sunt deceü!' [Alas, how they are tricked! They are all deceived! (25924-5); and when the Greeks deceive King Priam by pretending to leave only to come back and burn the city of Troy and its inhabitants down to the ground it is described as 'Ensi s'engignent' [deceived in this way](25976).⁴¹⁹ Gower picks up on this close association between the treachery of the Greeks and the word 'engin' in Book I with his account of the 'Trojan Horse' and the ruse of the false peace accord. He writes that 'In privé place so thei trete / With fair behest and giftes grete / Of gold, that thei hem have engine / Togedre; and whan thei be covined, / Thei feignen for to make a pes' (CA, I 1099-1103). This very clear association of the word 'engin' with deceit, trickery, and

⁴¹⁵ Scott Lightsey, *Manmade Marvels in Medieval Culture and Literature* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp.75-76.

⁴¹⁶ *DMLBS* 'ingenium'.

⁴¹⁷ *AND* 'engin'.

⁴¹⁸ For Gower's use of 'engin' as scheme/trick see 2.1956; 'engined' as scheme/trick see 1.878; 1.1101; 5.4571. For Gower's use of 'engin' as weapon/technical device see 5.2156 (though this comes contextually during a ruse and I believe the double sense of the word is being invoked here); 5.7239. The other two instances in the *Confessio* of 'engyn' and Carmente's 'engin' I discuss in this chapter.

⁴¹⁹ See Emily L. Reiner, 'The Ambiguous Greek in Old French and Middle English Literature', (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, University of Toronto, 2008).

fraud as well as its literary connection to the treasonous actions of the Greeks undoubtedly imbues the invention of Carmente's Latin alphabet with a sense of deception and perfidy. Petrus Alfonsi, in particular, writes in his *Disciplina Clericalis* that 'ab ingenio feminae perversae custodiat se homo' [the ingenium of women is perverse and ought to be avoided].⁴²⁰ Gower uses the term 'engyn' to describe the cloth inventions of Minerva and Delbora, daughter of Eve, which already contains the idea of concealment and deceitful artful decoration. This aspect is heightened, as we can see, through Gower's choice of 'engyn' with all its connotations of 'guile' and 'artifice'. These connotations spread to 'Genius' himself, a literary fiction whose name is also etymologically derived from the Latin *ingenium*, and thus 'guile' and 'artifice' haunt him throughout the text ultimately destabilising his authority as truth-teller. Similar is Gower's opening Latin heading where his muse is Carmenta (*Carmentis*) herself and he asks for her aid channelled through her Latin alphabet. This is now tainted with links to treachery and deceit and ultimately corrupts the Latin alphabet and destabilises Gower's Latin headings long-seen by critics as the authoritative voice in the *Confessio* as well as the reliability of the entire text itself.

Genius continues expounding on the Latin textual sign by remarking that:

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 stoned upon congruité (CA, IV, 2640-2646)

Aristarchus of Samothrace who is indicated here, was a Hellenistic scholar, tutor to the Egyptian royals, and director of the Library of Alexandria in the third century B.C. His whole life was devoted to grammatical and critical pursuits, with the view to explain and constitute correct texts of the ancient poets of Greece, such as Homer, Pindar, Archilochus, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Aristophanes, Ion, and others. His grammatical studies embraced everything, which the term in its widest sense then comprised, and he

⁴²⁰ Petrus Alfonsi, *Die Disciplina Clericalis des Petrus Alfonsi*, eds Alfons Hilka and Werner Söderhjelm (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1911), pp.18-22, p.1.

together with his great contemporaries are regarded as the first who established fixed principles of grammar, though Aristarchus himself is often called the prince of grammarians.⁴²¹ He was responsible for establishing the standard text and explaining his choice of reading as well as the denotations of puzzling words, expressions, character motivation, and overall meaning⁴²² - in essence the first literary critic. Furthermore, he was accepted as a critic of ‘the highest intelligence and rarest learning’ who ‘recognized the dangers of cultural surplus, and acknowledged that the great number of writings was more harmful than beneficial to good letters’ and in response devised a canon of only ten orators thought to be the most important.⁴²³ He was most famous for his vast commentary and editing of Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. He sought, however, to correct what he deemed corrupt or error filled sections of Homer’s epic poem by removing narrative inconsistencies, excising improper passages, and athetizing lines he evaluated as false and spurious. He was a strict anti-allegorist in his interpretation of Homer’s work preferring instead to view it euhemeristically - that Homer’s myths were grounded in reality rather than fable. This resulted in him, in particular, expurgating sections regarding divine agency and replacing it with human factors. Additionally, Aristarchus painstakingly attempted to isolate the original Homeric voice from what he considered illegitimate poetic addenda by newer poets or ‘neoteroi’ by completely deleting these sections from what he believed to be the core text and placing them in his commentaries instead. However these commentaries have been ultimately lost to time and ironically, then, in attempting to create a unified and authentic Homeric text this ‘Aristarchean editorial policy of shading over the supposedly peripheral neoteric elements in order to highlight the core text of Homer resulted ultimately - and unintentionally - in the relegation of this periphery into a permanent outer darkness’.⁴²⁴ Each subsequent edition of the *Iliad* or *Odyssey* is a little different, as the editors rely on different manuscripts and fragments, and make different choices as to the most accurate text to use thus no authentic or original text survives not in Gower’s time or our own. Aristarchus is moreover, a link back to the Greek language and its problems of veracity and corruption in this Latin section which already bears the hallmarks of unreliability. ‘Dindimus’ or Didymus

⁴²¹ William Smith, *A Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography and Mythology* (London: John Murray, 1880), ‘Aristarchus’, pp.290-91.

⁴²² Nigel Wilson, ed., *Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece*, (New York, NY: Routledge, 2006), p.93.

⁴²³ H.B. Nisbet and Claude Rawson, eds, *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism: Volume 4 The Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.561.

⁴²⁴ Gregory Nagy, “Aristarchus and the Greek Epic Cycle”, *Classics@* Volume 6, ed. Efimia D. Karakantza, The Center for Hellenic Studies of Harvard University, (December 21, 2010).

Chalcenterus born in Alexandria and dying in Rome and intellectually flourishing at the time of Cicero and the Emperor Augustus helps to fully bridge that link. Didymus was, furthermore, a follower of Aristarchus and a grammarian, literary critic, and voluminous commentator in his own right credited with introducing Alexandrian learning to Rome. ‘Donat’ is Aelius Donatus and he was a Roman grammarian and rhetor, teacher of St Jerome. Together these two Roman literary critics represent the introduction of Grammar into Latin text and speech. Indeed, Gower’s description of grammar in Book VII is almost identical to the inventions of both Didymus and Donat, with both highlighting grammar’s conventionality: ‘Gramaire ferste hath for to teche / To speke upon congruité’ (CA, VII, 1530-31). Genius remarks that grammar revolves around ‘How that Latin schal be componed’ (CA, IV, 2643). ‘Componed’ meaning constructed or combined comes into Middle English from Old French ‘compondre’ which in turn comes from the Latin root ‘compono’.⁴²⁵ ‘Compono’ as we have seen in Chapter Two relates to items artificially put together and has connotations of sensuality and being ‘dressed up’. Genius also uses another form of the Middle English verb ‘componed’ in his section on ‘Rethorique’ in Book VII when he writes ‘Hou Tullius his Rethorique / Componeth’ (CA, VII, 1590) and both instances linguistically link Gower’s Latin heading to this section through the Latin word ‘compositi’ as detailed in Chapter Two.

However, as put forward in Chapter Two, Gower’s grammar alongside logic is subservient to rhetoric in Book VII, ‘It hath Gramaire, it hath Logique’ (CA, VII, 1528), and thus any attempt at disciplining language through grammar or logic in a post-Babel world ultimately becomes futile as these arts become linked to the unstable post-lapsarian world of rhetoric and the corrupted verbal sign. And the art of rhetoric is the next invention in Genius’ list. He tells Amans:

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 (CA, IV, 2647-51)

⁴²⁵ *MED* ‘compounen’ v.

Genius' description of Ciceronian rhetoric⁴²⁶ corresponds to his section in Book VII highlighting the language of dress, concealment, and adornment of surfaces through the word 'pike' and again emphasises the prominence of style [eloquence]. Peck has glossed 'pike' to mean 'choose' but Gower uses it elsewhere and each time in relation to language or outward appearance/external sign or gesture.⁴²⁷ In Book VIII 'pike' is paired with 'peinte' when Genius tries to convince Amans and his reader that he has not used any Ciceronian rhetoric throughout the *Confessio*. In this instance, 'pike' most certainly has the meaning of to polish or adorn either dress or language⁴²⁸ but the verb is equally ambiguous and may also relate to the verb 'picchen', which stems from the same Old English root meaning to array or adorn something with gems, to bejewel.⁴²⁹ Both verbs include a heightened sense of ornamentation and decoration and the verb 'pike' that Gower uses here in relation to Cicero's rhetorical writings seems more likely to have this sense than Peck's.

Following on immediately from Genius' account of Cicero's rhetoric comes the invention of translation:

And after that out of Hebreu
 Jerom, which the language kneu,
 The Bible, in which the Lawe is closed,
 Into Latin he hath transposed;
 And many an other writer eek
 Out of Caldee, Arabe, and Grek
 With gret labour the bokes wise
 Translateden and otherwise. (CA, IV, 2653-2660)

St Jerome, a theologian and historian most famous for his translation of the Bible into Latin that became known as the *Vulgate*, was a student of Aelius Donatus in Rome, which seamlessly links these passages together. He supposedly learned rhetorical and philosophical studies from Donatus as well as his Latin and Greek proficiencies. He

⁴²⁶ It is not entirely clear whether Gower believes 'Tullius' and 'Cithero' to be two separate people or not. This is the only time in the *Confessio* that both names appear together and Gower always uses 'Tullius' to clearly denote Cicero elsewhere. See Book VI 1401; Book VII 1589; Book VIII 3119.

⁴²⁷ J.D. Pickles and J.L. Dawson, eds, *A Concordance to John Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1987), 'pike', p. 470.

⁴²⁸ *MED* 'piken' v. (1), (5) (a).

⁴²⁹ *MED* 'picchen' v. (3) (a).

famously recounts in *Epistola XXII* how he ‘would fast only that [he] might afterwards read Cicero’ and indulge in Plautus the comedic Roman dramatist.⁴³⁰ In returning afterwards to the Prophets’ writings he found, in comparison, ‘their style to be rude and repellent’. Feeling particularly guilty about this, Jerome tells of a dream he has where he is brought before God who chastises him for being a Ciceronian and not a Christian:

Cum subito raptus in spiritu, ad tribunal iudicis pertrahor; ubi tantum luminis, et tantum erat ex circumstantium claritate fulgoris, ut projectus in terram, sursum aspicere non auderem. Interrogatus de conditione, Christianum me esse respondi. Et ille qui praesidebat: Mentiris, ait, Ciceronianus es, non Christianus: ubi enim thesaurus tuus, ibi et cor tuum (Matthew 6.21)⁴³¹

[Suddenly I was caught up in the spirit and dragged before the judgment seat of the Judge; and here the light was so bright, and those who stood around were so radiant, that I cast myself upon the ground and did not dare to look up. Asked who and what I was I replied: ‘I am a Christian’. But He who presided said: ‘Thou liest, thou art a follower of Cicero and not of Christ. For “where thy treasure is, there will thy heart be also.”’]

Jerome relates how he was scourged by God for this vice and he cries in response ‘Lord, if ever again I possess worldly books [*codices saeculares*], or if ever again I read such, I have denied Thee’ and from that day forth he read the books of God [*studio divina legisse*] with a zeal greater than he had previously given to the books of men [*mortalia legeram*]. Thus for Jerome, the mingling of pagan, Gentile [*Gentilium litterarum*], secular works with those of the Divine was unfeasible and constituted a sin worthy of punishment and torture from God. And pointedly highlighted in those works are the books of Cicero, the author of the art of rhetoric. Jerome describes the act of translation in terms of changing clothing in his *Preface of Eusebius*, writing that Cicero had translated Plato word for

⁴³⁰ St Jerome, *Letter XXII to Eustochium*, (30)

<http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/public/jerome_letter_22_ciceronian_or_christian.htm> [accessed September 29th 2017]. All English translation comes from this edition.

⁴³¹ St Jerome, *Epistola XXII Ad Eustochiam*, (30)

<http://www.earlychurchtexts.com/main/jerome/jerome_ep_22_ciceronian_or_christian.shtml> [accessed September 29th 2017]. All Latin text comes from this edition.

word [*ad verbum interpretatus*]⁴³² and had published the Greek author Aratus in ‘Roman dress’ [et cum Aratum jam Romanum hexametris versibus edidisset].⁴³³ Elsewhere he writes of those that view Sacred Literature as unpolished and harsh sounding as tending ‘rather to be thoroughly horrified at the mean clothing, so to speak, before they find the fair body of the things within’. Jerome highlights the complexities and obstacles associated with translation and its faithfulness to the original. He writes ‘difficile est enim, alienas lineas insequentem non alicubi excidere; arduum, ut quae in alia lingua bene dicta sunt, eundem decorem in translatione conservent’ [For it is difficult for someone who is following another's lines not to stray outside them from time to time; when things were said well in another language, it is hard to preserve the same elegance in translation]. He continues ‘Si ad verbum interpretor, absurde resonat; si ob necessitatem aliquid in ordine, [vel] in sermone mutavero, ab interpretis videbor officio recessisse’ [If I translate word for word, it sounds absurd; if perforce I alter something in sequence or style, I shall seem to have failed in the duty of a translator]. With this in mind, Jerome beseeches his readers Vincentius and Gallienus not to judge these imperfections of translation harshly as critics but only as friends. This may have been a reaction to harsh criticism that was previously levelled at Jerome and he writes in his *Epistola LVII to Pammachius* that ‘a rash tongue [presumed by Jerome to be Rufinus] charges me with ignorance or falsehood’.⁴³⁴ Jerome had translated from Greek into Latin *Letter LI* (from Epiphanius to John of Jerusalem) and when the letter became public he was accused of making errors either as a result of incompetency or as a deliberate attempt to falsify the original. He was also charged with having an inadequate knowledge of the Greek language. He writes in *Epistola LVII to Pammachius* that ‘they tell the unlearned that I have falsified the original, that I have not rendered word for word, that I have put “dear friend” in place of “honourable sir,” and more shameful still! That I have cut down my translation by omitting the words αἰδεσιμῶτατε Πάππα’. Here, he vehemently and protractedly defends his translation method and following the process of Cicero and Horace [already failing in his promise to God to give up Roman literature] he writes ‘For

⁴³² St Jerome, *Eusebii praefatio*, <http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome_chronicle_04_latin_prefaces.htm> [accessed September 29th 2017]. All Latin text comes from this edition.

⁴³³ St Jerome, *Preface of Eusebius*, <http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/jerome_chronicle_01_prefaces.htm> [accessed September 29th 2017]. All English translations come from this edition.

⁴³⁴ St Jerome, *Epistola LVII to Pammachius*, <<http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/3001057.htm>> [accessed September 29th 2017]. All English translations come from this edition.

I myself not only admit but freely proclaim that in translating from the Greek (except in the case of the holy scriptures where even the order of the words is a mystery) I render sense for sense and not word for word.' This substitution of idiom or sense for sense, he considers to be the best method of translation. However, this system required not just an excellent knowledge of both languages, which word for word translation would necessitate, but also comprehensively relied on a major interpretive effort by a human agent - the translator. This interpretive effort, this intimate understanding of the sense was thus subject to the translator's preferences and prejudices. And St Jerome was a man with many prejudices and in particular was his extraordinary personal bias against women and their sexuality that was ubiquitous throughout all of his writings and culminated in his profoundly misogynistic *Tract Against Jovinium*. This decidedly biased antifeminist *Tract*, which is concerned with the necessity for female virginity, is in the fourteenth century famously railed against by Chaucer through his character the Wife of Bath.

Though Jerome has promised to only use sense for sense for secular literature he was, as we have seen, quite inconsistent with those promises and in many instances deviated from his word-for-word translation of his *Vulgate Bible*. He controversially declared the Greek Septuagint inaccurate, which St Augustine amongst others regarded as divinely inspired, and instead translated the Old Testament from the Hebrew which he claimed competency in and this is what Genius is referring to in his passage above. Jane Barr shows that without doubt Jerome was influenced by his prejudices and allowed them to interfere with his accurate translation of the Vulgate Bible text. She writes of one particular mistranslation and act of poetic licence:

A very important alteration is made by Jerome in Genesis 3.16. God has been addressing severe words to the serpent in the garden and he finishes his warning to Eve with the words: 'Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.' While 'he will rule over you' makes clear the husband's predominance over the wife, the impact is softened somewhat by the other half of the verse, 'Your desire will be for your husband', the Hebrew word for 'desire' here having sexual content. In Jerome's version,

however, that half of the verse is changed to ‘You will be under the power of your husband’ and ‘he will rule over you’ completes the verse.⁴³⁵

Complete subjection and subordination of the woman is now laid down, Barr writes, and this independent female sexual component, this ‘strong desire’ which he translates in Genesis 4 as ‘appetitus’ is fully removed from the woman’s remit as ‘wife’ and replaced with an affirmation of her subservience. This is not the only element of the Genesis story that involved stylistic elaboration and alteration of meaning by Jerome. John Flood notes ‘in Genesis 3:6 it is recounted that Eve, having eaten of the forbidden fruit, gave also unto her husband *with her*. “With her” - present in the Hebrew and Septuagint - is absent from the Vulgate as if Jerome seems unwilling to accept that the representative male was unprotesting to the serpent.’⁴³⁶ Therefore, rather than helping to clarify the reliability of language, Genius’ reference to St Jerome specifically in relation to translation and his linguistic skill only exacerbates the problem because of his inaccuracies, his prejudices, and accusations of falsehood and manipulation of language. Gower appears to pick up on this untrustworthiness of the sign and translation by inserting the Middle English verb ‘transposed’ to describe Jerome’s actions. ‘Transposen’ comes into English from the Old French ‘transposer’ meaning to move, displace or alter.⁴³⁷ The primary meaning of the Middle English ‘transposen’ is to alter or change something into something else, to change one’s appearance but also to falsify in particular a written contractual term, testimony or misconstrue a set of instructions.⁴³⁸ This linguistic choice reveals Gower’s interpretation of the act of translating as an act of displacement and an alteration of the original but a false one at that which mirrors the exact charges levelled at Jerome for his Latin translation of *Letter LI*. Ultimately what is exposed is that, for Gower, even Scripture in its translated form is not exempt from the effects of the Fall and the corrosion of the ambiguous sign. Indeed, Genius himself lumps Jerome’s translation of the Bible in with all other translations of scholarly work from the Chaldean language, Arabic, and Greek into Latin, languages which earlier Genius refers to when enumerating his list of alchemical writers. Here he plays on the word ‘scripture’ to mean not Divine scripture

⁴³⁵ Jane Barr, ‘The Influence of Saint Jerome on Medieval Attitudes to Women’, in *After Eve*, ed. Janet Martin Soskice (London: Collins Marshall Pickering, 1990)

<<http://www.womenpriests.org/theology/barr.asp>> n.p. [accessed September 29th 2017].

⁴³⁶ John Flood, *Representations of Eve in Antiquity and the English Middle Ages* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2011), p.7.

⁴³⁷ *AND* ‘tresposer’ v.

⁴³⁸ *MED* ‘transposen’ v. (a).

but arcane alchemical writings: ‘Bot thei that writen the scripture / Of Grek, Arabe, and of Caldee’ (CA, IV, 2626-7) thus reinforcing the idea that all translations are subject to the corrupted sign.

Genius, as R. F. Yeager remarks, ‘brings to a close his history of the growth of Latin letters with a single illustration’ that of Ovid:

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
That love wringe thee to sore,
Beholde Ovide and take his lore (CA, IV, 2668-2674)

Peck writes that ‘the allusion is to such works in general as *Amores*, *Ars Amatoria*, and the *Remedia Amoris*, though love lies at the heart of the *Heroides* and many of the tales in the *Metamorphoses*, Gower’s two most favoured sources’.⁴³⁹ Jenni Nuttall investigates the use of the Middle English term ‘poesie’, as Gower employs here in relation to Ovid, concluding that:

It’s striking that in many of the Middle English usages of *poesie* the referent stays fairly restricted and often clearly signalled *in situ*. [...] the term is often used to label very specific elements of classical writing, especially that concerning mythic or fantastical subjects (in particular the naming and representation of pagan deities; stellification; magic and sorcery). Gower restricts the word to his Ovidian source material, usually incidents of metamorphosis, carefully signalling that the narrative that follows needs to be read as *poetrie*.⁴⁴⁰

⁴³⁹ John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell Peck, p. 404.

⁴⁴⁰ Jenni Nuttall, ‘Poesie and Poetrie’, conference paper given at *Middle English Literary Theory Workshop: Keywords and Methodologies*, University of Sussex, 16th June 2016
<<http://stylisticienne.com/middle-english-literary-theory/>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

Gower writes ‘Wherof a tale in poesie’ (CA, IV, 1038) when recounting the Ovidian tale of *Icarus*; he writes ‘This finde I write in poesie’ (CA, IV, 2927) before Genius’ retelling of the Ovidian tale of *Ceix and Alceone* and again in this same tale he writes ‘For ther, as seith in the poesie’ (CA, IV, 2988); he includes ‘Wherof a tale in poesie’ (CA, IV, 3315) which precedes his Ovidian tale of *Argus and Mercury*; he again writes ‘He tolde a tale in poesie’ (CA, V, 637) when telling the Ovidian tale of *Vulcan, Mars, and Venus*; and Genius tells Amans ‘Nou herkne a tale of Poesie’ before his story of *Hercules and Faunus* a fabliau taken from Ovid’s *Fasti*; and ‘This finde I write in poesie’ comes before the tale of the *Marriage of Pirithous* from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. Nuttall is entirely correct in suggesting that Gower’s use of the term ‘poesie’ is exclusively reserved for Ovid and Ovidian tales of impossible transformation or mythical and imaginary magic. He does not use the term in the *Confessio Amantis* once outside of these contexts. In each instance it foregrounds the fantastical and fictional world of poetry. Chaucer only uses the word once throughout his complete corpus, at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* ‘But litel book, no making thow n’envie, / But subgit be to alle poesye; / And kis the steppes where as thow seest pace / Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace.’ (TC, V, 1789-1792). Here Chaucer employs ‘poesye’ to mean pagan, mythical, and classical poetic epic fiction as can be gleaned from the authors he lists. All these authors are the disseminators in poetic form of Greek and Trojan myth the subject of Chaucer’s own poem. All five Latin poets appear in his *House of Fame* on pillars of differing metals and while playfully describing the fictitious literary envy between them all Chaucer highlights the charge of historical untruthfulness that could be levelled at them all: ‘Oon seyde that Omer made lyes, / Feynyng in hys poetries, / And was to Grekes favourable; / Therfor held he hyt but fable’ (HoF, 1477-80). This fiction, intensely at odds with truth, as subtly suggested by Chaucer’s use of ‘poeyse’ is also how Lydgate uses the term in the Prologue to his *Troy Book* composed only a short time after Gower’s writings:

Albe that somme han the trouthe spared
 In her writyng and pleylnly not declared
 So as it was nor tolde out feithfully
 But it transformed in her *poysy*
 Thorough veyn *fables*, whiche of entencioun
 They han contrevyed by *false transumpcioun*
 To *hyde trouthe falsely* under cloude,

And the *sothe of malys for to schroude*,
 As Omer dide, the whiche in his writing
Ifeyned hathe ful many divers thyng
 That never was, as Guydo lyst devise,
 And thingys done in another wyse
 He hathe *transformed than the trouthe* was
 And *feyned falsly* that goddis in this caas (Prologue, 259-272)⁴⁴¹

Lydgate equates ‘poesie’ (particularly that of classical pagan poets such as Homer) with a plethora of words and phrases denoting falsehood such as ‘fables’, ‘false transumpcioun’⁴⁴², hiding ‘trouthe falsely’, truth shrouded through ‘malys’, ‘ifeyned’, transforming the ‘trouthe’ and ‘feyned falsly’. He reiterates throughout this Prologue that poetic language and this ‘poesie’ seek to conceal and veil the truth rather than express it, to make it ultimately inaccessible. Nuttall also remarks that:

At times, *poesie*’s meaning is entirely pejorative. Given its associations with metaphorical or oblique meaning which is figurative rather than literal, it’s perhaps not surprising that it is used by both Hoccleve and Usk to refer to language which sounds sweet and attractive in its subtlety and intricacy, but which is not only empty of meaning but dangerously capable of persuading or deceiving.⁴⁴³

In a section discussing speech which is ‘queynt’ or which has a ‘subtel maner understandine’ Usk writes ‘Freel-witted people supposen in suche poesies to be begyled’ (ToL, Book III, 840-841).⁴⁴⁴ Hoccleve writes similarly in his *La Male Regle* ‘O flaterie! O lurkyng pestilence! / If sum man dide his cure and diligence / To stoppe his eres fro thy poesie, / And nat wolde herkne a word of thy sentence / Vnto his greif it were a

⁴⁴¹ John Lydgate, *Troy Book: Selections*, ed. Robert R. Edwards (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998). Italics my own.

⁴⁴² Nuttall writes that ‘*Transumptio*, as the notes to this Prologue in the *Idea of the Vernacular* explain, is the Latin equivalent of metalepsis, a farfetched metaphor or one in which more than one metaphorical substitution is made’ in Nuttall, ‘Poesie and Poetrie’.

⁴⁴³ Nuttall, ‘Poesie and Poetrie’.

⁴⁴⁴ Thomas Usk, *Testament of Love*, ed. R. Allen Shoaf (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998).

remedie'. Both authors see 'poesie' as something that ought to be avoided, as precariously, almost immorally so, seductive and dishonest.

Ovid's poetic reputation since his exile and throughout the ages was full of highs and lows and his art was viewed ambiguously. In the eighth century A.D. Théodulf of Orléans recommended Ovid's poetry for the philosophical truths that might be unearthed from under their fabulous *integumenta* [clothing]. But, Conrad of Hirsau, in the twelfth century, on the contrary, finds it hard to see the merit in digging for gold amongst the foul stench of pagan poetry. He writes:

Cum tanta nobis subpetant, quorum honesta lectio nos ingenio
quidem acuit et provocat ad virtutes, cur scripta viciosa sunt
appetenda, quorum sensus inficit studiis exercitanda ingenia?
Cur ovidianis libris Christi tyrunculus docile summittat ingenium,
in quibus etsi potest aurum in stercore inveniri, querentem
tamen polluit ipse fetor adiacens auro, licet avidum auri

[Although we ought to pursue certain texts, the honest reading of which sharpens our wit and leads us on to virtue, why ought vicious readings be sought, the sense of which infects the wit which ought, rather, to be exercised by study? Why ought the docile novice of Christ submit his wit to Ovid's books, for although gold can be found in the dung, the stench from the foul matter alongside the gold pollutes the seeker, however avid he might be for the gold.]⁴⁴⁵

In the fourteenth century, in the climate that Gower was writing his Ovidian inspired *Confessio*, there appears a vigorous attack on Ovid's works in the form of the anonymous poem, once attributed to Petrarch, succinctly entitled *Antiovidianus*. In it the author declares that 'A te compositus liber est nullus nisi fallax'⁴⁴⁶ (line 21) '[Ovid] wrote nothing that was not false' and, like William of St. Thierry, the anonymous poet contrasts

⁴⁴⁵ Latin text and translation quoted in Michael A. Calabrese, 'Meretricious Mixtures: Gold, Dung, and the *Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and Tale*', *The Chaucer Review*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (1993), 277-292 (pp.222-223).

⁴⁴⁶ Pseudo-Petrarca, *Antiovidianus*, <<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A2011.01.0880>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

Ovidian love with that of divine love in his *De Dignitate Amoris*.⁴⁴⁷ He further tells of how Ovid's poetry is excrement masquerading as precious gold and links Ovid's craft with its seductive language to the serpent Satan and the moment of the fall of man and language itself:

Nasonem mea musa ferit, quia stercora sumens Auravit musa tarn rutilante
sua Effecit suis decorosis versibus, vt sit Fel mox, nox lux, mors vita
laborque quies. Inde sathan, draco callidus, hostis iniquis et audax,
Insidians iuuenum mollia corda capit. Subuerterunt mala verba fidem,
sanctos quoque mores Corrumpunt sepe. Sit michi prima parens Hinc
testis, sathane pravis seducta loquelis. Heu patimur verbis omnia dampna
malis! Hoc opus oro vide, visum diffundere cura. Quondam Nasonis, sis
rogo prece dei. (3-14)

[My muse strikes Ovid, because taking up dung, with his shining muse he made it gold, and by means of his pleasing verses made gall into honey, night into light, death into life, and labour into rest. From whence comes Satan, the subtle dragon, bold and base enemy; poised, he snatches the soft hearts of the young. Evil words subvert faith and often corrupt sacred mores. Let our first parent be witness to me of this, for she was seduced by the depraved speech of Satan. Lo! all our sorrows we suffer because of evil words. I beg you, behold this work, which having been seen, seek to spread. You who were herald of Ovid, be, I pray, a herald of God.]⁴⁴⁸

As Michael Calabrese writes the '*Antiovidianus* poet continues his attack on Ovid as a type of verbal alchemist who can aurify dung'.⁴⁴⁹ The poet contrasts Ovid's pagan words of poetry with that of God and in this fourteenth-century poem the practice of false alchemy is equated to the art of the poet - both superficially gilding debased and valueless things. Indeed, both engage in fraud. These '*decorosis versibus*' [pleasing verses] that conceal a less pleasant interior mirror Gower's complaint in his section on rhetoric in Book VII that '*pulcra sermonis*' [beautiful words] are empty of truth.

⁴⁴⁷ PL, 381ff.

⁴⁴⁸ Quoted in Michael A. Calabrese, '*Meretricious Mixtures*', p.279.

⁴⁴⁹ Michael A. Calabrese, '*Meretricious Mixtures*', p.282.

Thus, Gower has dealt a devastating blow to favourable ideas of *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii*, painting them as completely degenerative forces. In this chapter, he has shown the decay of the textual sign from the one original language down through the ages, with each stage incurring more corruptions. This decline culminates in Latin Ovidian poetry. Thus, for Gower, poetic fable is the pinnacle of post-lapsarian linguistic decline. And Gower remarks ‘Bot toward oure marches here’ (CA, IV, 2633) suggesting urgent movement, that the oncoming decline is very much heading to the shores of ‘Englond’. With that in mind we can turn to Gower’s alchemical passage that is centrally placed in the very middle of this decay and degeneration of civilization.

IV: 'THE LOST IS HAD, THE LUCRE IS LORE'

In Book IV of the *Confessio Amantis* the character Genius introduces a one-hundred-and-seventy-five line detailed and surprisingly positive discussion of alchemy. Gower's alchemical passage, however, is in no way a *sui generis* topic in medieval literature. As we shall see, Jean de Meun's immeasurably influential work *Le Roman de la Rose* includes a protracted alchemical section narrated by the allegorical Nature. Gower's contemporaries Chaucer and Langland both include alchemy in their work in differing ways as well as Hoccleve and Lydgate. Nonetheless, Gower's disquisition on alchemy has not been widely appreciated by traditional scholarship and until relatively recently⁴⁵⁰ has largely been dismissed as a banal digression both extraneous and irrelevant to the main subject. Russell Peck, the most important modern editor of the *Confessio Amantis* remarks of this section that 'it may seem ironic that the discussion of Somnolence should follow so tedious a section of the poem, though we must remind ourselves as audience, that just such particularities, though laborious in the gleaning, help the mind establish a stay against Sloth'.⁴⁵¹ Stanton J. Linden is especially critical of Gower's exposition on alchemy charging it with being overly encyclopedic, lacking distinctive literary qualities and completely devoid of entertainment as opposed to the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* which he calls Chaucer's artistic "glorious fiction".⁴⁵² In this chapter I will argue that, far from providing a distraction to or indeed a soporific digression from the cardinal subject matter in the *Confessio*, Gower's alchemical exegesis is central to his poetic. Gower includes another lengthy section on alchemy in his *Mirour de l'Omme* and in it he links alchemy to fraud, deceit, and linguistic sophistry. In the *Confessio*, despite Genius' positive enthusiasm, I argue that alchemy is connected to the decline of the world and language and his exegesis offers an analogy for the loss of linguistic signification in the modern post-lapsarian world.⁴⁵³

⁴⁵⁰For the most recent analysis of Gower's alchemy see R.F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion*, pp.167-168, Stephanie L. Batkie "'Of the parfite medicine": *Merita Perpetuata* in Gower's Vernacular Alchemy', pp.157-168, and Karla Taylor 'Inside Out in Gower's Republic of Letters', pp.169-181, in *John Gower Trilingual Poet*; Matthew W. Irvin, *The Poetic Voices of John Gower: Politics and Personae in the Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014), pp.196-203.

⁴⁵¹ John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell Peck, Vol. 2, p.36.

⁴⁵²Stanton J. Linden, *Darke Hieroglyphicks: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration* (Lexington, KY: Kentucky University Press, 1996), pp.54-58.

⁴⁵³ This overwhelming modern judgement of Gower's alchemical passage as an overly prosaic waste of textual space was not always the case however. In 1652, Elias Ashmole published a book entitled *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*. In the prolegomena Ashmole tells us that he will reclaim the wisdom of his fellow countrymen from undue obscurity. The English philosophers, whom he calls prophets,

GOWER'S MEDIEVAL ALCHEMY

Medieval alchemy has had a less than glowing critical reputation throughout the years, and is frequently associated with satanic and demonic practices. Stephanie Batkie recently remarked that 'Alchemy is satirized, condemned and generally mistrusted. It is probably heretical. Its literature fails to describe it clearly because the practice is a shadowy, immoral sham [...] In short, there is a reason that Dante condemns alchemists to one of the lowest circles of Hell'.⁴⁵⁴ Indeed, in Canto XXIX of *Inferno* Dante places two alchemists in the tenth bolgia alongside the personators in the eighth circle solely dedicated to the fraudulent. The first, Griffolino of Arezzo, was said to have tricked the wealthy Albert of Siena into paying him to teach him how to fly and 'with this extraordinary gift of speech, he promised to enable that simple fool to accomplish great prodigies'.⁴⁵⁵ But when his promises are revealed to be just empty words and this Daedalus is subsequently proved unable to turn Albert into Icarus, Albert's father, the Bishop of Siena, had Griffolino burnt at the stake as a sorcerer. The second alchemist identifies himself as Capocchio who is said to have been a friend and fellow student of Dante's. According to the *Anonimo fiorentino* Capocchio, was known as an 'ape of nature' on account of his extraordinary ability to mimic other people's speech, their personal traits, and objects:

Et fu uno che, a modo d'uno uomo di corte, seppe contraffare ogni uomo che volea, et ogni cosa, tanto ch'egli pareva propriamente la cosa o l'uomo ch'egli contraffaceva in ciascuno atto: diesis nell'ultimo a contraffare i metalli, come egli facea gli uomini.

include both Chaucer and Gower and he includes in his book both the Canon's Yeoman's Tale and the alchemical passage in the Confessio Amantis. In his note to the Canon's Yeoman's Tale he writes: 'Now as concerning Chaucer (the author of this tale) he is ranked among the Hermetic Philosophers, and his Master in this science was Sir John Gower'. Indeed, Ashmole not only believed that Chaucer and Gower were both authorities on alchemy but further asserts that Gower was in fact the teacher of this Hermetic Art to Chaucer. Ashmole declares as a note on Gower that: 'He is placed in the Register of our Hermetique Philosophers: and one that adopted into the Inheritance of this Mistry, our famous English Poet, Geoffrey Chaucer. In [the Confessio], it appears he fully understood the Secret, for he gives you a faithful account of the properties of the Mineral, Vegetable and Animal Stones, and affirms the Art to be true', Elias Ashmole, *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum*, p.484.

⁴⁵⁴ Batkie, 'Merita Perpetuata', p.157.

⁴⁵⁵ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy*, trans. Charles S. Singleton, *Inferno*, p.536.

[He was a person who like the performers at court could counterfeit anyone or anything he liked, so much so, that he looked just like the thing or the man he was counterfeiting. Later he began to counterfeit metals, just as he had done people.]⁴⁵⁶

Cappocchio was subsequently burnt at the stake in 1292. Both men were placed in the eighth circle because of their supposed alchemical practices but both have also verbally deceived and counterfeited their words for money and other profitable favours. This canto is not to be regarded, however, as a complete condemnation of alchemy as a science, as C.S. Gutkind writes, but rather as an exposure of it when used as an art of deception for lucrative purposes.⁴⁵⁷ Robert Epstein concurs writing ‘note that Dante is not condemning alchemists for falsely claiming to be able to transmute metals. Rather, Dante’s alchemists are languishing at the bottom of the eighth circle because the precious metals that they transform other metals into are not the true gold and silver that they seem to be, and this makes them a species of falsifiers or counterfeiters’.⁴⁵⁸ This difference was already felt in the thirteenth century. Arnaldo de Villanova, Petrus Bonus, and Aquinas trenchantly distinguished between two species of alchemy. One that involved a rigorous or comparatively ascetic search for the transmutation of inferior metals into gold and silver; the other involved swindlers prospering from others’ gullibility, ignorance and above all greed. It is clear that Dante refers to the latter in Canto XXIX as the *contrapasso* for these alchemists who distort perception and corrupt the senses is a leprous and interminable itching skin disease, stench, darkness, and physical pain.

Furthermore, in the following Canto XXX, it is revealed that the falsifiers are tormented by the ancient spirits of Myrrha who, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* Book X, was so overcome with sexual desire for her father that she deceived him, along with her nurse, into fornicating with her by disguising herself/counterfeiting her person (*falsificando sè in altrui forma*, 41) and Gianni Schicchi, who falsified/counterfeited (*falsificare in sè*, 44) the voice of a deceased man, Buoso Donati, dictating a new will that would legally legitimize him as heir, leaving him more than handsomely bequeathed. Dante retains an

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid, p.543. I have chosen to translate ‘*contraffare*’ as ‘counterfeit’ in each instance to maximise the idea of falsification. Singleton translates it as ‘mimic’ in the first two instances but as ‘counterfeit’ when discussing metals in the last instance.

⁴⁵⁷ C.S. Gutkind, ‘Dante Alighieri Alchymicus Amoris’, *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 3, No.1, (Oct 1939-Jan 1940), 153-155 (p.154).

⁴⁵⁸ Robert Epstein, ‘Dismal Science: Chaucer and Gower on Alchemy and Economy’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, Volume 36, (2014), 209-248 (pp.217-218).

element of falsifying linguistically throughout this and the previous canto. Moreover, Canto XXX houses other falsifiers such as Master Adam of Brescia, who counterfeited gold coins (*là dov' io falsai/la lega suggellata del Batista*, 73-74), Potiphar's wife who falsely accused Joseph of sexual assault in Genesis 39:6-20 (*L'una è la falsa ch'accusò Giuseppo*, 97) and Sinon (*falso Sinon greco da Troia*, 98) who falsely claimed to be a Greek deserter leading to the fall and destruction of Troy. Brendan O'Connell convincingly demonstrates the influence of Dante's alchemists, counterfeiters, and falsifiers in these two cantos (XXIX and XXX) on Chaucer's short poem *Chaucers Wordes unto Adam, His Owne Scriveyn*. Here, Chaucer laments the lack of truthful transmission of his words by his scribe, a theme in the background of all his works as briefly discussed in my Introduction. O'Connell links the falsifier's *contrapasso* of an itching, scabby, skin disease with Chaucer's suggested punishment for his 'scriveyn's' scribal transgressions in the line 'Under thy longe lokkes thou most have the scall' (3) thus, like Dante, Chaucer relates the counterfeiters to the idea of verbal and textual misrepresentation. Certainly, the central position of the word 'trewe', coming at the end of the very middle of Chaucer's poem, expresses exactly what it is that the poet ultimately desires and what it is that is completely absent: truth. O'Connell writes further that 'the counterfeiter is also a copier who makes a false version of the original; more specifically, Dante articulates an explicit link between Adam's counterfeiting and the falsifying of words. The liar Sinon argues with Adam and exclaims: "S'io dissì falso, e tu falsasti il conio" (If I spoke falsely ... thou didst falsify the coin, *Inf XXX 115*)'.⁴⁵⁹

Alchemical practice lends itself particularly well to the art of writing and textual production in the Middle Ages as the ink that generated Dante's words, as well as Chaucer's and Gower's, would have been made with the metallic substance iron-gall. Of course, alchemically iron is the basest metal and the poet as alchemist would transmute it into literary gold.⁴⁶⁰ Dante's lack of criticism of alchemy as a whole in *Inferno*, instead focussing on those that managed to defraud verbally for monetary gain is commensurate with the Church's stance particularly in the fourteenth century.⁴⁶¹

⁴⁵⁹ Brendan O'Connell, 'Adam Scriveyn and the Falsifiers of Dante's *Inferno*: A New Interpretation of Chaucer's *Wordes*', *The Chaucer Review*, Vol. 40, No.1, (2005), 39-57 (p.50).

⁴⁶⁰ David Raybin equates the poet with the alchemist 'whose methods and goals are much the same' (p.199) in "'And pave it al of silver and of gold": The Humane Artistry of the Canon's Yeoman's Tale' in *Rebels and Rivals: The Contestive Spirit in The Canterbury Tales*, eds Susanna Greer Fein, David Raybin, and Peter C. Braeger (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1991), 189-212.

⁴⁶¹ Interestingly, Dante himself in his own time was believed to have possessed alchemical powers and this association prevailed well into the seventeenth century. Gutkind, 'Dante Alighieri', p.154. Gutkind is here referring to the case of Bartholomew Cagnolati, a Milanese priest who in February 1320 testifies at

In 1317 Pope John XXII issued a decree condemning the abuses of alchemical practice entitled *Spondent quas non exhibent* (They promise what they do not deliver). The title alone articulates the central verbal deception at the heart of the matter and communicates the deep rift between word and deed. This decree is persistently mistaken by modern critics for a Papal Bull forbidding all alchemy and thereby punishable by death. Even the *Catholic Encyclopaedia* erroneously states that it is a bull.⁴⁶² There is, importantly, a substantial distinction between a decree and a bull, the former being but of lesser significance, usually referring only to passing matters of discipline.⁴⁶³ The Pope's decretal came with the subtitle 'The Crime of Falsification' and stated that the pseudo-chemists 'pretend to make genuine gold and silver by a sophistic transmutation'⁴⁶⁴ further reinforcing the alchemical and verbal link. Pope John did not dwell on the art vs nature argument and as Karla Taylor points out he 'banned only false alchemists' and 'forbade the pretended use of alchemy to deceive others and to pass off counterfeited money as legal tender'.⁴⁶⁵ The decree further states that the person convicted of pretending to make gold and silver and selling it to others should pay into the public treasury an equal amount of gold and silver that he had made. The money thus paid into the public treasury was to be given to the poor. It is evident from this that Pope John did not intend to condemn alchemists for their ideology but for their spurious claims and false rhetoric as well as their potential disruptive financial activity.⁴⁶⁶

Pope John was the student of the distinguished ecclesiastics Thomas Aquinas⁴⁶⁷ and Albertus Magnus, both of whom had a keen interest in alchemy, at the University of Paris.⁴⁶⁸ He was, however, a trained lawyer rather than theologian and was a brilliant

Avignon before a commission of cardinals against Matteo Visconti accusing him of practicing necromancy to kill the pope and mentions Dante Alighieri as a necromancer and alchemist that Visconti wanted to convene in Milan.

⁴⁶² *Catholic Encyclopedia* 'Alchemy', <<http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/01272b.htm>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

⁴⁶³ James J. Walsh, *The Popes and Science: The Story of the Papal Relations to Science from the Middle Ages* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 1915), p.124.

⁴⁶⁴ Pope John XXII, *Spondent quas non exhibent*, <<http://www.webcitation.org/6RaBmzv04>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

⁴⁶⁵ Karla Taylor, 'Inside Out in Gower's Republic of Letters', p.170.

⁴⁶⁶ Sheila Delany, 'Run Silent, run deep: Heresy and alchemy as medieval versions of utopia', *Medieval Literary Politics: Shapes of Ideology*, ed. Sheila Delany (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1990), pp.1-18, p.15.

⁴⁶⁷ Aquinas investigated theologically the question of whether gold produced by alchemy could be sold as real gold ultimately claiming that it could, if it really possess the properties of gold in *Summa Theologiae* II-II.77.2. The alchemical treatise *Aurora Consergens* is attributed to Aquinas though probably spuriously.

⁴⁶⁸ Walsh, *The Popes and Science*, pp.135-136.

organizer and administrator⁴⁶⁹ and one of his main objectives and lasting achievements was in the sphere of finance. The Papal treasury was greatly depleted at the time of his accession but was remarkably increased by the time he died. In fact, he acquired so much wealth in such a short amount of time it was widely rumoured that he himself had produced it by alchemical means. Either way, it seems that Pope John's decretal had no tangible negative effect on alchemical practice and writing. As Jonathan Hughes notes in his recent study on fourteenth-century alchemy, 'in the library of the Papacy there were many manuscripts of alchemical works and the Papal court played a dominant role (together with the imperial court) in the dissemination of the most influential alchemical, occult, text of this period, the "Secreta Secretorum"'.⁴⁷⁰ The reason for this, he further explains, is that 'the mysteries of the Christian faith increasingly came to be depicted and explained by means of chemical analysis and this legitimized the study of alchemy'.⁴⁷¹ Similarly, in England, as on the continent, alchemical writing was immensely popular, which can be attested by Dorothea Singer's *Catalogue of Latin and Vernacular Alchemical Manuscripts*. This catalogue is an imposing three-volume work of nearly 1,200 pages containing over 1,100 manuscripts of original treatises, copies, translations, and commentaries present in England and Ireland from the twelfth to the fifteenth centuries⁴⁷².

In the thirteenth century *Le Roman de la Rose*, a work that profoundly influenced Dante's poetry as well as Chaucer and Gower, the subject of alchemy occurs amid a philosophical digression on the virtues of Nature over Art. The narrator tells us that Nature is continually in her forge hammering away and of her creations remarks:

Quant autre conseil n'I puet metre,
Si taille empreinte de tel lettre,
Qu'el lor donne forms veroies
En coinz de diverses monnoies (RR, 15983-86)

⁴⁶⁹ Alan Charles Kors, Edward Peters, eds, *Witchcraft in Europe 400-1700: A Documentary History*, (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 2001), p.118.

⁴⁷⁰ Jonathan Hughes, *The Rise of Alchemy in 14th century England: Plantagenet Kings and the Search for the Philosopher's Stone*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), p.66.

⁴⁷¹ Hughes, *The Rise of Alchemy*, p.66.

⁴⁷² There are also references to over 200 'Alchemical and technical Recipes and Notes' dating from the same period.

[When she has no other solution, she stamps them out bearing the impress of particular letters, for she gives them true forms in coins of different currencies]

Here, the narrator uses the language of metallurgy to describe Nature's creative process. Not only does he place the allegorical Nature in a forge to hammer, beat, and smith but also speaks of coin minting and currency and their legitimizing true stamps. In contrast, the narrator describes Art as taking 'faisoit ses exemplaires, / Qui ne fait pas choses si voires' [these [examples] for her models, but her forms are not so true] (RR, 15987-88) and further describes her as 'Et la contrefait comme singes' [like an ape, she mimics Nature] (RR, 16001). Thus, if Nature's creations retain the true stamp or minting letter which guarantees and corresponds to the purity and genuine value of the coin, then Art represents the false stamp, the debased coin, and non-genuine artefact. In fact, we find that the narrator uses the word 'contrefait' to suggest that Art imitates like an ape but the word very similarly means to 'counterfeit'⁴⁷³ as in to 'counterfeit or forge coins' and forms part of the lexicon of the falsifier of currency. It seems likely that the narrator is drawing on this sense of the word given the metallurgic and monetary context of these lines. Dante, too, picking up on this monetary sense, uses a form of this metaphor 'di natura buona scimia' [a good ape of nature] (*Inf.* XXIX, 39) when Cappocchio describes himself during his confession to counterfeiting 'falsai' (*Inf.* XXIX, 37) metals by alchemy. While Nature is true, Art is counterfeit - always misrepresentation. It can only give the 'sembleront' [appearance]⁴⁷⁴ (RR, 16004) of things.

It is in this context that alchemy in *Le Roman de la Rose* is introduced. The narrator remarks of Art:

Ou d'alquemie tant aprenge,
Que tous metauz en color taingne,
Qu'el se porroit ainçois tuer,
Que les especes remuer,
Se tant ne fait qu'el les ramaine

⁴⁷³ *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français (1330-1500)*, 'contrefaire' v.,
<<http://www.atilf.fr/dmf/definition/contrefaire>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

⁴⁷⁴ *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français (1330-1500)*, 'sembler' v.1,
<[Http://www.atilf.fr/dmf/definition/sembler1](http://www.atilf.fr/dmf/definition/sembler1)> [accessed September 29th 2017].

A lor nature premeraine.
Euvre tant cum ele vivra,
Jà Nature n'aconsivra:
Et se tant se voloit pener
Qu'el les I séust ramener,
Si li faudroit, espoir, science
De venir a cele atrempance,
Quant el feroit son elixir,
Don't la forme devoit issir,
Qui devise entr'eus lor sustances
Par especiaus differences,
Si cum il pert au defenir,
Qui bien en set à chief venir. (RR, 16035-52)

[She may learn enough alchemy to be able to colour every metal, but she would kill herself before she could transmute the species, unless she first reduced them to their elemental matter; if she worked all her life, she would never catch up with Nature. If she were willing to toil until she could so reduce them, when it came to making her elixir, she would perhaps still lack the necessary knowledge to achieve the right compound to produce form, which separates the substances on the basis of specific differences, as is apparent in their definitions, when these are correct.]

Art, when attempting to practice alchemy, may be able to colour or change the appearance of metals but is ultimately incapable of truly transforming their essence or their internal properties. Art can only deal with superficialities, externalities. Art's alchemical labour is ultimately a fruitless one. Nonetheless, the narrator declares that alchemy is a 'true art':

Neporquant c'est chose notable,
Alquemie est ars veritable:
Qui sagement en ovreroit,
Grans merveilles i troveroit (RR, 16053-56)

[It is worthy of note, nevertheless, that alchemy is a true art, and that anyone who worked at it seriously would discover great marvels.]

The narrator gives no further explanation of what exactly he means by ‘ars veritable’ [true art] but these ‘merveilles’ that come about through serious effort can change the complexions and appearances of singular parts of things so much so that they become alienated from their original species. Two examples are given to illustrate the theory, one being of natural origin and the other man-made. The latter example given is that of glass-making. The narrator discusses how through a process of depuration, which removes impurities through heating, the fern plant can produce both ash and glass yet glass is not a fern nor is fern glass. This is a rather simplistic example and logically not quite sound as it leaves out all the steps and other ingredients involved in making the glass. The fern must first be reduced to a type of potash, then this fern-ash needs to be blended with quartz sand along with other compounds such as magnesia and lime and slowly heated through a process called fritting. Finally it is melted in a very hot furnace before it can be blown. The natural example offered is that of thunder and lightning when hailstones fall from the clouds even though they did not rise as stones. Experts may know the causes of such form changes but to the uninitiated it can appear wondrous. Chaucer’s Squire’s Tale rehearses this exact scene from *Le Roman de la Rose* when discussing the ‘lewedness’ of people and their ‘wonder’ in the face of ‘qeuynte’ science:

But nethlees somme seiden that it was
Wonder to maken of fern-asshen glas,
And yet nys glas nat lyk asshen of fern;
But, for they han knowen it so fern,
Therefore cesseth hir janglyng and hir wonder.
As soore wondren somme on cause of thonder,
On ebbe, on flood, on gossamer, and on myst,
And alle thing, til that cause is wyst. (SqT, 253-260)

These examples of form change in glass-making and hailstones, thus, provide the theory that alchemy may be possible according to the narrator. If it can be done in the previous examples perhaps changing the forms of metals through the process of purification and refinement of bodies and spirits, then metals could conceivably be transformed into other

genuine metals like pure gold or pure silver. On paper all this sounds plausible and it is, after all, books that tell us how the natural growth of precious metals and stones in the mines occurs. Books also provide us with the ways to prepare spirits to enter bodies to replicate such an evolution. Despite arguing at length for the theoretical possibility of alchemy the narrator abruptly ends this alchemical section with a surprising declaration:

Mès ce ne feroient cil mie
Qui euvrent de sophisterie
Travaillent tant cum il vivront
Jà Nature n'a consivront (RR, 16115-18)

[But such things will never be achieved by those who indulge in trickery: even if they labour all their lives, they will never catch up with Nature.]

Amant, the narrator, announces that alchemy, though a true art, in contemporary times is subject to trickery and specifically 'sophisterie' [sophistry]⁴⁷⁵, that is fallacious speech and deceitful arguments. Like Dante and Pope John's decree, a focus is placed more prominently on alchemy as an act of verbal trickery involving exploitation of the grammatical and persuasive arts of rhetoric. Alchemical transmutation cannot be achieved by those who practice such verbal equivocation, equivocation we must remember that is symptomatic of the Fall. Nature, in her confession that follows, remarks of her creation of man that:

Orguilles est, murdriers et lerres,
Fel, convoiteus, avers, trichierres,
Desesperés, glous, mesdisans,
Et halneus, et despisans,
Mescréans, envieus, mentierres,
Parjurs, faussaires, fox, vantierres,
Et inconstans, et foloiables,
Idolastres, desagréables,

⁴⁷⁵ *Dictionnaire du Moyen Français (1330-1500)*, 'sophisterie' n.,
<<http://www.atilf.fr/dmf/definition/sophisterie>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

Traïstres et faus ypocrites,
Et pareceus, et sodomites (RR, 19195-19204)

[Man is a proud, murderous thief, a cruel, covetous, miserly traitor, a desperate, scandalmongering rascal, full of hatred and contempt, suspicion and envy. He is a deceitful, perjured liar, a foolish boaster, and unpredictable madman, an ungrateful idolater, a false and treacherous hypocrite, an idle sodomite.]

The allegorical Nature has made man, amongst many other vices, a deceitful liar thus it seems likely according to Amant's theory then that no man has been able to achieve pure alchemical transmutation due to his inherent post-lapsarian affinity for fraudulence. Therefore, two versions of alchemy emerge, one theoretical perhaps only achieved in Edenic times before man became corrupted and the other contemporary but fraudulent and unsuccessful.

Petrarch, in the second half of the fourteenth century in his *Remedies for Prosperity*, discourses on alchemy with a dialogue between Hope and Reason with Reason arguing that alchemy is completely false and mocks Hope's 'stupid credulity' in the face of 'rotten promises':

HOPE: I hope for good results with alchemy.

REASON: It is surprising that you hope for something which never happened to you or anyone else. All reports that it happened to some are fabricated by people who have found it expedient to believe so.⁴⁷⁶

Reason believes that reports (textual and oral) of all successful alchemical transmutations are fictional and have been entirely invented by wretched liars who promise great things. For Reason, alchemy is a fable. Gower, too, in his *Mirour de l'Omme*, written in this same time frame, was acutely aware of the connection between deceit, fraud, and alchemy. In a long section on 'Triche' [Fraud] Gower details how this deceitful vice is associated with

⁴⁷⁶ Conrad H. Rawski, *Petrarch's Remedies for Fortune Fair and Foul: A Modern English Translation of 'De remediis utriusque Fortune,' with a Commentary*, Vol. 1 (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), pp.299-300.

those who live by trades (mestier)⁴⁷⁷, craftwork, and artifice (d'artifice), all who serve 'dame Avarice' (MO, 25512). Gower describes 'Triche' overwhelmingly in linguistic terms and particularly as an example of the great disparity between word and conceit, signifier and signified. He writes:

Et si parole bell et gent,
Et fait leur bonne compaignie
Du bouche, mais du pensement
Son lucre quiert soubtilement
Soubz l'ombre de sa courtoisie. (MO, 25280-84)

[And he [Fraud] talks so well and politely and entertains them well with his mouth; but in his thought he seeks his lucre subtly under the shadow of his courtesy.]

He begins his attack on fraud with the prime example of the metal worker and goldsmith⁴⁷⁸:

Triche est Orfevere au plus souvent,
Mais lors ne tient il pas covent,
Qant il d'alconomie allie
Le fin orr et le fin argent;
Si fait quider a l'autre gent
Qe sa falsine soit verraie
Dont le vessel ainz, q'om l'essaie,
Vent et recoit la bonne paie
De l'esterling, et tielement

⁴⁷⁷ It is worth noting that 'mestier' (tradesmen) in the language of the goldsmiths of London was often used as a euphemism for prostitution. *AND*, 'mestier'. See also *Wardens' Accounts and Court Minute Books of the Goldsmiths' Mistery of London 1334-1446*, ed. Lisa Jefferson (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2003). Chaucer uses the term 'alkamystre' for alchemist in his Canon's Yeoman's Tale (1204) which must be an English portmanteau word partly formed of the Anglo-Norman 'mestier' and which is most often applied to the occupation of goldsmith as seen here in the *Mirour de l'Homme*.

⁴⁷⁸ The goldsmiths of London had formed an organised guild, or mistery (in the medieval sense of 'craft' or 'profession') by the twelfth century. Granted their first royal charter in 1327 by Edward III, they are one of the twelve great livery companies, and still oversee the work of goldsmiths, silversmiths and jewellers.

Del argent q'il corrompt et plaie
Sa pompe et son orguil desplaie,
Et se contient trop richement
 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
Qe triche ad esté vesseller;
Car son vessell et le denier
Ne sont pas d'une touche egal. (MO, 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. So before someone can test the vessel, he sells it and receives a good price paid in sterling silver. And thus, corrupted by silver, he displays his pomp and pride and lives on a very rich scale. 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 a silver coin.]

Gower seems to be channelling Pope John XXII's decree 'they promise what they cannot deliver' here by stating that through alchemy the goldsmith breaks his 'covent' [agreement or promise].⁴⁷⁹ Again, like Dante and *Le Roman de la Rose*, this emphasises the overwhelming verbal characteristic of modern alchemy. By breaking the verbal agreement and blending gold with an inferior metal, thus devaluing it, Gower's alchemy

⁴⁷⁹AND, 'covent' (2).

widens the gap not only between word and deed but inner and outer, signifier and signified. Like the art of rhetoric, fraudulent alchemy with its colours convinces one to believe what is false ('falsine') is true ('verraie'). But before anyone can assay ('l'essaie') the metal, test its true interior qualities, the goldsmith has already sold it on. Thus, Gower equally belies a deep concern with fraudulent finances and counterfeit currency similar to the anxieties harboured by both Dante and Pope John XXII.

Gower tells us that the goldsmith sells or exchanges the false gold for real sterling silver currency ('l'esterling') in turn becoming corrupted by the silver 'Del argent q'il corrompt', which plays on the moral corruption of the avarice of the goldsmith and the adulteration of the gold itself. The goldsmith had a particularly close relationship with the Crown because they controlled the exchange of old coin and plate for new coin and produced coinage.⁴⁸⁰ Therefore, if the goldsmith's wares were alloyed, adulterated, and impure unlike they claimed this would cause a significant problem for the public finances and certainly disrupt the value of the King's coins. Consequently, alchemy had a political and social dimension to it through the illicit multiplication of coins with the false image of the King's face stamped on them. Taylor writes that 'false transmutation by dishonest pseudo-chemists resembles and enables the counterfeiting of money. In both cases, a visible image is duplicated in order to deceive: the alchemist's false image of gold, and the counterfeiter's doubly false image of the King's face'.⁴⁸¹ The false outward stamp/sign contradicts the worthless inner quality of the coin. The fake alloyed silver, like gold, when assayed at the Mint will feel remarkably different from that of its surface appearance. Outer and inner do not correspond. The word 'alkenemie' ('alconomie' in Middle English in the *Confessio*) that Gower uses here, is itself an Anglo-Norman word that specifically forms part of the language of the medieval goldsmiths of London⁴⁸² and means a metallic composition, a yellowish alloy, imitating gold⁴⁸³ thus denoting a metal that looks like gold, but is not. The signifier of gold appearance bears no relation to the signified internal qualities of gold. Therefore the idea of counterfeiting and simulation, the break between signifier and signified, is intrinsically present in the word itself.⁴⁸⁴

⁴⁸⁰ Colum P. Hourihane, ed., *The Grove Encyclopedia of Medieval Art and Architecture*, Vol. 1 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), p.109.

⁴⁸¹ Karla Taylor, 'Inside Out in Gower's Republic of Letters', p.170.

⁴⁸² Roger A. Ladd, "*That men knewen the moneie*": *Mint and Metaphor in the Confessio Amantis*, unpublished conference paper at: III International Congress of the John Gower Society, 30 June-3 July, 2014, University of Rochester, New York.

⁴⁸³ *AND*, 'alkenemie'.

⁴⁸⁴ 'Alkenemie' and counterfeiting of coins are closely linked as can be seen in this report 'as by name of John Pygas a monk of the priory of St James Bristol, which is a cell of the said abbey, he is indicted for

Gower continues his attack on the fraudulent goldsmith. He, again, emphasises verbal deceit and breaking of promises when he describes the goldsmith who sells the customer's gold or silver behind their back at a profit and then lies outright that the product broke and needs more time to make another. Gower deepens the gulf between word and deed and encapsulates this linguistic swindle in his ending couplet, which states that fraud conceals deceit through delicate words:

Si Triche t'ait coupe ou ceinture
De ton argent parfait, al hure,
Je loo quie prest soies a prendre;
Car d'une chose je t'assure,
S'un autre vient en ta demure
Et Triche en poet son gaign comprendre,
Il le fait comme son proper vendre;
Mais il t'en fra depuis entendre
Q'il l'ot bien fait, mais aventure
Le fist quasser, dont falt attendre:
Ensi te dist parole tender,
Et t'en deçoit par couverture (MO, 25537-25548)

[If Fraud has made a cup or belt from your silver, I advise that you should be quick to go get it; for I assure you of one thing: If you should delay and if another person comes and if Fraud sees a chance to make a profit, he will sell your property as his own. And afterwards he will lead you to believe that he would have made it, but perchance he broke it, so that you must wait. Thus he tells you soft words and covertly deceives you.]

Gower again highlights the sophistic nature of the goldsmith and his fraud by underscoring his method of hiding behind 'parole tender' [soft words] to deceive. His soft words, his well-chosen external signs, conceal a mendacious heart. In Gower's section

having, on Friday in Easter week 16 Richard II, with others in the high street at Bristol treasonably made sixty groats of a false metal called "alconamye" to the likeness of good money of the realm, and on many other days in that year many other groats of the same metal, and for having delivered them in payment to divers men of the town.'(Public Record Office, Close roll, C. 54, no. 235, 17 Richard II).

on ‘Rethorique’ in Book VII, he writes of rhetoric’s skill in these terms: ‘The softe word the loude stilleth’ (CA, VII, 1583). In the next verse, Gower again focuses on the major break between what is promised and what is delivered and ultimately declares that the fraudulent goldsmith is disregarding truth:

Si Triche t’ait de son ovreigne
Mis certain jour, molt ert grant peine
Si deinz le mois avoir porras
Q’il t’ad promis deinz la semeine:
Ainz mainte guile et mainte treine
T’en fra, et molt sovent par cas
Au fin del tout tu failleras,
Ou autrement tu plederas,
Car si la loy ne luy constreigne,
Du loyaté ne, tient il pas,
Ensi fait Triche son pourchas,
Du mestier qui l’orfèvre meine (MO, 25549-25560)

[If Fraud has promised you his work for a certain day, it will be with great pain that you can have within a month that which he promised within the week. On the contrary, he will delay and beguile you very much; and often in the end you will fail even to get it or else you will have to sue him, for he pays no heed to honesty unless the law constrains him. Thus Fraud who follows the goldsmith’s trade makes his illegal profits.]

Like metals, jewels can also be forged and Marian Campbell notes that ‘the medieval understanding of the term jeweller is problematic, for it seems to mean variously a retailer of goldsmith’s work (including jewellery), a retailer of gemstones, an appraiser of gemstones, and only sometimes the craftsmen who worked or set the stones.’⁴⁸⁵ Certainly ‘from the late medieval period the production of jewellery and object of vertu in precious metals was under the jurisdiction of the Goldsmith’s Company, and

⁴⁸⁵ Marian Campbell, ‘Gold, Silver and Precious Stones’, in *English Medieval Industries: Craftsmen, Techniques, Products*, eds John Blair and Nigel Ramsay (London: Hambledon Press, 1991), p.151.

jewellery-making was recognized as an independent profession by the late fourteenth century'.⁴⁸⁶ This is attested to by the late fourteenth-century introduction of the Middle English word 'jeueler', the first instance of which only occurs in 1380.⁴⁸⁷ Previous to this 'aspects of the goldsmith's work included seals, coins, and jewellery'.⁴⁸⁸ In his *Vox Clamantis* Gower talks of craftsmen (*artifices*) (VC, V, xiiii, 787) purging (*purgat*) (VC, V, xviii, 789), a clear alchemical term, gold and silver. And he further links it to glassmaking and jewellery, writing that: 'Conficit ex vitris gemmas oculo preciosas / Nomen et addit eis fallat vt inde magis (VC, V, xviii, 791-2) [Out of glass she [Fraud] fashions jewels precious to the eye, and she stakes her reputation upon them in order to deceive you the more]. Marco Beretta explicates the intimate connection between the alchemist and the glass maker both in their shared theories and practices.⁴⁸⁹ Indeed both arts seek to manipulate nature as the narrator of *Le Roman de la Rose* notes. Gower continues to use the term 'mestier' for both goldsmith/chemist and jeweller in his *Mirour*. He writes:

Et des jeualx avient auci
 Q'ascune fois Triche est saisi;
 Mais lors a les seignours s'en vait,
 Et fait le moustre et jure ensi,
 Q'ainçois q'il d'eaux serra parti,
 Les grandes sommes il en trait
 De leur argent. Mais lors malfait,
 Qant il la piere ad contrefait
 Que ne valt point un parasi,⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁶ Gordon Campbell, ed., *The Grove Encyclopedia of Decorative Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), Vol.1, pp.107-166, p.53.

⁴⁸⁷ *MED* 'jeuler' n.

⁴⁸⁸ Colum P. Hourihane, ed., *The Grove Encyclopedia of the Medieval Art and Architecture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), Vol.1, p.110.

⁴⁸⁹ Marco Beretta, *The Alchemy of Glass: Counterfeit, Imitation, and Transmutation in Ancient Glassmaking* (Sagamore Beach, MA: Science History Publications, 2009).

⁴⁹⁰ The word 'parasi' is very interesting here. According to the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* it denotes a denier coin minted at Paris and is an object of little worth, AND 'parisis'. The *Middle English Dictionary* records it as an extremely rare word meaning a denier of Paris worth one-fourth more than that of Tours, *MED* 'paresis' n. The only two examples given are late fifteenth-century translations of Guillaume de Deguileville's (1295-1358) *Le Pèlerinage de la Vie Humaine*. One translation is anonymous and the other (later) version comes from John Lydgate. The word 'parasi' occurs in this text in an alchemical context when the allegorical 'Covetyse' also known as 'Lady Avarice' declares how she can through trickery and subtle magic counterfeit coins and produce false currency and forged money. Like Gower's section on 'Triche' servant of 'dame Avarice' Lydgate remarks that all this is achieved

Et par deceipte et par aguait

Le vent; car qui q'en soit enrichi (MO, 25561-25572)

[And it also happens sometimes that Fraud gets hold of jewels. Then he goes to nobles, shows the jewels, and swears that he will not part with them except for a great amount of their money. Then he does ill, for he counterfeits the stone (so that the fake stone is not worth a half-penny) and by deceit and cunning he sells the counterfeit. He cares not who has thus been undone, provided he himself be enriched.]

Again, Gower notes that Fraud, masquerading as the goldsmith/jeweller, engages in verbal trickery and persuasion. He first counterfeits his words and then counterfeits ('contrefait') his precious stones until both are worthless and do not represent that which they appear to. The deceitful goldsmith displays them to men of great wealth and solemnly avows that he will not part with them unless offered large sums of silver. These false oaths are quickly broken and we see Gower turn to the language of coins ('parasi')

through 'Avarice's' 'engyn', which is similar to Gower's use of 'engineer' in the next verse after his use of 'parasi':

My thryddë hand, mad by gret wyle
With the wych I ber the ffyle,
I shal, as kometh to remembraunce,
Declarë to the (in substaunce)
What thyng yt doth specefye.
And the trouthe doth sygnefye,
Thys hand ys wrouht ageyn nature,
Wych euere doth hys besy cure
Always (off entent vntrewe)
To forgë money newe and newe,
Other folkys gold dystresse,
And hys ownë to encesse,
By som fals collusioun.

And euere in hys entencioun
He ffynt out weyës sotylly
ffor tenresse hym-sylff ther-by;
By maner off enchaument
He ffyndeth out (in hys entent)
To tournë, by hys sotylte,
A Tourneys to A parysee
By hys engyn, wyl vndertake,
Off fyvë, syxë for to make. (17645-17666)

John Lydgate, *The pilgrimage of the life of man, English by John Lydgate, A. D. 1426, from the French of Guillaume de Deguileville, A. D. 1330, 1335*, ed. F.J. Furnivall, EETS (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trübner & Co., 1899).

to denote how empty of value the fraudulent jeweller's counterfeit words and stones are. Appearance and reality, inner and outer, of both word and object are not in agreement. In the next verse, Gower tells us that none, whether duke, count, prince, or king has not been beguiled and defrauded by the goldsmith's 'enginer' (MO, 25583) [cunning], a word related to Gower's 'engyn' which, as discussed in Chapter Three, Gower overwhelmingly uses to mean 'guile' and 'deceit'. This section can ultimately be linked to Book IV of the *Confessio* with the description of Minerva and Delbora's 'engyn' in their discovery of the art of wool and linen clothing, but, more importantly, to Carmente's 'engyn' in her discovery of the Latin textual sign. And, Latin was the predominant language of alchemical treatises throughout the Middle Ages.

Gower concludes his section on 'Triche' with an explicit concatenation of words, herbs, and stones:

Om dist que dieus en trois parties
 Ad grandes vertus departies;
 Ce sont, si comme l'en vait distant,
 Paroles, herbes et perries:
 Par ceaux fait homme les mestries
 Et les merveilles tout avant,
 Mais ore est autre que devant,
 Les perriers sont plus plesant
 Qe les saphirs ne les rubies;
 Mais je ne say pas nepourqant
 Si celle grace soit sourdant
 Ou des vertus ou des soties (MO, 25585-25596)

[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 feats⁴⁹¹ and marvels. But now the situation is different from before, for

⁴⁹¹ Burton-Wilson translates the Anglo-Norman 'mestries' as 'feats'. 'Mestries' has a secondary meaning of magical deed and pejoratively as a clever trick which Gower may be semantically playing with here. *AND* 'mestrie' (3).

jewellers are more enticing⁴⁹² than sapphires or rubies. But I know not whether this grace arises from virtues or from follies.]

This section climactically and distinctly ties together the verbal sign and alchemical practice. It finally capitalizes on Gower's cumulative inferences throughout his section on 'Triche' by confirming a comparison between the two. Importantly, this verse directly connects to Gower's passage on the art of rhetoric in the *Confessio* where, as we have seen in Chapter Two, he almost identically remarks 'In ston and gras vertu ther is / Bot yit the bokes tellen this, / That word above alle erthli thinges / Is vertuous in his doinges' (CA, VII, 1545-448). It is, of course, repeated in the Latin heading to the same section: 'Herba, lapis, sermo, tria sunt virtute repleta, / Vis tamen ex verbi pondere plura facit' [Herb, stone, speech are all three replete with strength; the force from words, nevertheless, produces more consequences]⁴⁹³ (CA, VII, v.). Lifting this passage almost whole from the *Mirour de l'Omme* shows that Gower is making a correlation in his own mind between the counterfeit objects and words of the fraudulent goldsmith and that of the rhetorician. Furthermore, this Middle English passage that highlights the power of language over that of herbs and stones is followed by the lines:

For if the wordes semen goode
And ben wel spoke at mannes ere,
Whan that there is no trouthe there,
Thei don fulofte gret deceipte;
For whan the word to the conceipte
Discordeth in so double a wise,
Such rethorique is to despise (CA, VII, 1550-1556)

Recognising the force of words, this passage warns against what, to the ear, seem to be good words. As outlined in Chapter Two, the verb 'semen' overwhelmingly carries the semantic range of appearance, superficiality and outward countenance.⁴⁹⁴ But appearances can be deceiving and rhetoric, like alchemy, has the power to create illusion,

⁴⁹² Burton-Wilson translates the Anglo-Norman 'plesant' as 'enticing' here remarking that 'according to Cotgrave' used *verie* often ironically or in evil part', p.408.

⁴⁹³ Translation my own.

⁴⁹⁴ *MED* 'semen' v. (2) (1).

to swindle the senses, and widen the gap between falsehood and reality, word and conceit, signifier and signified. In Gower's Anglo-Norman version he does not explicitly specify that any one of the three objects of great power are more forceful than the other. His tone shifts instead to become more plangent focusing on a present that is startlingly different from the past.

James Dean has noted these allusions to the olden days and remarks that 'Gower models many passages on the rhetorical construction of "jadis mais ore"'.⁴⁹⁵ It is one of the most common constructions throughout the poem and in 'invoking something like a golden-age ethic' Gower 'measures the modern instances against the ancient models and finds the moderns wanting.'⁴⁹⁶ Gower describes a topsy-turvy deteriorating world throughout the poem remarking that 'Trop vait le mond du mal en pis' [the world is going from bad to worse] (MO, 26437). He elicits the same sentiment in this verse when he laments that the present situation is different from olden times and it is the jewellers/goldsmiths that are more attractive than their wares. In his 'golden age' past the beauty of precious stones spoke for themselves, their value immediately recognisable and so too of the not so precious stones. The stones' outer appearance and inner quality were readily apparent, signifier and signified were in harmony. But now in the more vice ridden, post-lapsarian present the customer needs beguiling to part with their money. Gower means here that the goldsmith's words are more flattering and seductive to the customer than their precious stones, perhaps because the value of their wares is now decreasing or is entirely counterfeit. Inner and outer quality no longer correspond in the contemporary world. In his *Vox Clamantis* Gower ominously remarks of Fraud that 'Quod minus est in re suplent iurancia verba, / Propter denarium vulnerat ipsa deum' [her words of promise make up for what in fact is deficient] (VC, V, xiii, 759-60) and, as an indictment to all the post-lapsarian arts outlined in Book IV of the *Confessio*, he writes that 'Omnem nunc artem Fraus facit esse suam' [Fraud now makes every art her own] (VC, V, xviii, 806). This is a condemnation that surely must include Gower's own poetry.

The allegorical character Dame Studie also speaks of 'alkenamy' in William Langland's *Piers Plowman*. She declares:

Ac Astronomy is hard thing, and yvel for to knowe;

⁴⁹⁵ Dean, *The World Grown Old*, p.236.

⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p.240.

Geometry and Geomesie is gynful speche;
Whoso thynketh werche with tho t[hre] thryveth ful late
For sorcerie is the sovereyn book that to the science bilongeth
'Yet art her fibicches in forceres of fele mennes makynge,
Experiments of Alkenamy the peple to deceyve (PP, X, 207-215)⁴⁹⁷

'Alkenamy', the imitation of gold, is conjoined with other occult and evil arts such as astronomy and geomancy and is classified as sorcery. Invented by Dame Studie merely as a way to mislead the human mind 'Alkenamy' is dismissed as an art full of 'fibicches' [tricks] and the work of 'gynful speche' [treacherous speech]. Dame Studie/Langland recognizes, like Gower before them, that alchemy is largely about deception and verbal trickery. The word 'gynful' meaning treacherous or guileful has its root in the Old French 'gyn' as does Gower's 'engyn' and both ultimately lead back to the Latin 'ingenium' which, as we have seen in Chapter Three, is viewed perjoratively.

Chaucer, too, in his Canon's Yeoman's Tale emphasises the 'slydinge science' (CYT, 732) and 'cursed craft' (CYT, 830) of alchemy as deception and ultimately a wasted effort (Al is in veyn, CYT, 843). The Yeoman tells us of the alchemist's language that 'our termes been so clerghial and so queynte' (CYT, 752) and that the Canon is an 'alkmystre' and 'ful many a man hath he bigiled er this' (CYT, 985). Of the alchemist, the Yeoman says:

His sleights and his infinite falsnesse
Ther koude no man writen, as I gesse,
In al this world of falshede nis his peer
For in his termes he wol hym so wynde,
And speke his wordes in so sly a kynde,
Whanne he commune shal with any wight,
That he wol make hym doten anonright,
But it a feend be, as hymselven is. (CYT, 976-984)

⁴⁹⁷ William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman B Text*, ed. A.V.C. Schmidt (London: J.M. Dent, 1993).

The Yeoman finds the alchemist to be utterly fraudulent and false, whose speech is full of guile and tricks. He tells you one thing but does another as exemplified by this exchange:

“What!” quod this chanoun, “sholde I be untrewed?”
Nay, that were thyng yfallen al of newe.
Trouthe is a thyng that I wol evere kepe
Unto that day in which that I schal crepe (CYT, 1042-1045)

The Canon swears blindly on his life that he is truthful and always will be until his end but his words are proven false and he cannot deliver what he promises so ardently. The alchemist’s outward words do not reveal their true interior and neither do the metals that masquerade as gold. Chaucer astutely warns us of the immense difference between appearance and reality, signifier and signified: ‘But al thing which that shineth as the gold / Nis nat gold, as that I have herd told’ (CYT, 962-3). Chaucer highlights the disparity between inner and outer, between word and deed, and finally between what is true and what is false: ‘He that semeth trewest is a thief’ (CYT, 968).

The whole tale itself also serves as a satire on scientific and philosophical writings. Chaucer breaks the tale into two sections with Latin headings the *Prima Pars* and *Pars Secunda*, which mimics such lofty philosophical writings as Aquinas’ *Summa Theologicae*. But rather than offering any substantial philosophical or alchemical truths, the defining characteristic of the Yeoman’s ‘account of alchemy is the predominance of lists of unfamiliar words. Lists of things and processes alternate in rapid succession, yet we are never given a clear and precise account of the processes or even a clear explanation of the ingredients used. The effect is bewildering’.⁴⁹⁸ And John Fyler further remarks that the ‘Yeoman’s chaotic, jumbled list of terms suggests the plight of fallen language as it decays into impenetrable jargon [and] it also manifests a version, however comic and debased, of poetic pleasure’.⁴⁹⁹

As we have seen, medieval alchemy practically and ideologically has never been denounced as heretical nor considered heterodoxy but on the contrary was embraced by

⁴⁹⁸ Brendan O’Connell, “‘Ignotum per ignocius’: Alchemy, Analogy and Poetics in Fragment VIII of *The Canterbury Tales*”, in *Transmission and Transformation in the Middle Ages: Texts and Contexts*, eds Kathy Cawsey and Jason Harris (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007), pp.131-56, p.149.

⁴⁹⁹ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.177.

the Church's most eminent scholars most of whom were in high favour with the Popes. However, it becomes clear that medieval alchemy has somewhat of a dual personality. Its practice can be dogged with accusations of fraud and yet concurrently it can in its theory occupy a lofty position amongst learned spiritual and theological scholars. We find that Gower in his *Mirour de l'Omme* finds both the practice and the practitioner of alchemy to be fraudulent and makes a clear link between the specious practice and specious words. With this in mind we can now turn to Gower's passage on alchemy.

'THE SCIENCE OF HIMSELF IS TREWE'

Gower introduces his alchemical passage in the *Confessio Amantis* during Genius' enumeration of the arts that were discovered throughout history. Genius nestles this long section, relative to the other discoveries, between the invention of mercantilism and the founding of the Latin alphabet. As pointed out in Chapter Three, this whole section is dominated by the decay of the verbal and textual sign. And this alchemical passage is no different coming during the treatment of innovations of the Greeks who, again in Chapter Three, I detail to be considered treacherous throughout the Middle Ages and in Gower's work as well. Genius opens this discussion on alchemy by neatly linking it to the preceding topic on the origins of metals. Curiously, he invokes the name of Saturn, a pagan Greek god, chronologically out of sync with the rest of his list which began with the Hebrew Cham and the originator of the Greek alphabet Cadmus. Thus, as with Raison, in the sample passage from *Le Roman de la Rose* in my Introduction, by association, Genius calls to mind the concept of the Saturnian Golden Age, a mythological and literary fabrication most famously promulgated by Ovid in his *Metamorphoses*. Gower writes:

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 wyne
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. (CA, IV, 2439-2450)

Genius admits that it is in ‘old bokes’ that he has found his information, therefore allowing more allusions to the textual sign. Yet he appears to move away from his Ovidian source when he writes that Saturn discovered, albeit a primitive form of, agricultural practice involving the sowing of corn and setting vines for grain and wine in turn nourishing all of mankind. Ovid tells us in *Metamorphoses* that this did not occur until the Age of Jupiter, the Silver Age. The need for agriculture itself constituted the loss of the Golden Age and it was only after the unceremonious fall of Saturn that Ceres discovered the art of tilling the ground and the sowing of grain. Ovid writes of the Golden Age: ‘ipsa quoque immunis rastroque intacta nec ullis / saucia vomeribus per se dabat omnia tellus, / contentique cibus nullo cogente creatis (Met, I, 101-103)⁵⁰⁰ [The earth itself, without compulsion, untouched by the hoe, unfurrowed by any share, produced all things spontaneously, and men were content with foods that grew without cultivation].⁵⁰¹ However, in the following Book V of the *Confessio*, in a section on heathen religions, we find that Gower is actually following Ovid’s timeline. He writes:

Saturnus after his exil
Fro Crete cam in gret peril
Into the londes of Ytaile,
And ther he dede gret mervaile,
Wherof his name duelleth yit
For he fond of his oghne wit
The ferst craft of plowh tilinge,
Of eringe and of corn sowinge,
And how men scholden sette vines
And o fthe grapes make wynes (CA, V, 1221-30)

⁵⁰⁰ Ovid, *Metamorphoses Books 1-5*, ed. William S. Anderson (Tulsa, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1997), 1.139-145; 148-9. All subsequent *Metamorphoses* Latin text comes from this edition.

⁵⁰¹ *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. Mary M. Innes (Middlesex: Penguin, 1955, repr. 1976), p.31. All subsequent *Metamorphoses* translations come from this edition.

He tells us that it is only after the fall of Saturn and his unceremonious castration and subsequent exile that he founded the art of ploughing and agriculture. Gower earlier in the section explains the circumstances of his exile thus:

Bot Jupiter, which was his sone
And of full age, his fader bond
And kutte of with his oghne hond
Hise genitals, which als so fast
Into the depe see he caste;
Wherof the Greks afferme and seie,
Thus whan thei were cast aweie
Cam Venus forth be weie of kinde
And afterward into an yle
This Jupiter him ded exile (CA, V, 852-62)

By raising the name of Saturn, Gower correspondingly raises the idea of the Golden Age but, as with Raison's example, embedded in his name is also its loss. Through Genius' linking of Saturn to agriculture he introduces the subsequent Age of Jupiter and with it his castration of Saturn which, as we have seen in my Introduction through Raison's retelling of the myth, brought into being a world of linguistic multiplicity, and of 'alienation, hierarchy and division - the world of the seasons, the arts, and land divided into ploughed parcels. The birth of Venus makes this the world of desire, a world in which the act of love has itself become labour, and the Herculean ploughman - Lover breaks into a sweat. Inevitably, the fallen world infects our terms of discourse' as well.⁵⁰² This episode, as it did in its corresponding exemplum in *Le Roman de la Rose*, draws attention to the fictionality of the situation. Indeed, Gower terms all the stories of the pagan Greek gods in this section 'fables' (CA, V, 1270). This is the context that Gower puts alchemy in, this is the purpose of his out of place naming of Saturn. Furthermore, this episode of Saturn's exile, and its position in Book IV between Cadmus and Carmente, allows Gower to offer a seamless link between Greek and Latin as he geographically is moved from 'Crete' to 'Ytalie'. This draws Latin further into the fictional, fabricated world of alchemy.

⁵⁰² Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.87.

Genius continues to tell us that Saturn through ‘his oghne wit [...] found the wei’ for or paved the route for the introduction of mercantilism and subsequently the minting of coins from various metals – namely gold and silver. Saturn’s inventions, then, directly led to the decline of the ages of the world. Coinage, minting, smelting and all metal work did not occur until the last and most degraded age - the Iron Age. It is this mining of gold and silver and their uses that tarnished the entire current age, the Iron Age, according to Ovid. The digging out of wealth from the earth occurred alongside the loss of truth and loyalty and in its place left trickery and treachery. Ovid makes a firm connection between these two events.

non scelerata tamen; de duro est ultima ferro.
protinus inrupit venae peioris in aevum
omne nefas: fugere pudor verumque fidesque;
in quorum subiere locum fraudesque dolusque
insidiaeque et vis et amor sceleratus habendi.
vela dabant ventis nec adhuc bene noverat illos
navita, quaeque prius steterant in montibus altis,
fluctibus ignotis insultavere carinae,
communemque prius ceu lumina solis et auras
cautus humum longo signavit limite mensor.
nec tantum segetes alimentaque debita dives
poscebatur humus, sed itum est in viscera terrae,
quasque reconsiderat Stygiisque admoverat umbris,
effodiuntur opes, inritamenta malorum.
iamque nocens ferrum ferroque nocentius aurum
prodierat, prodit bellum, quod pugnat utroque,
sanguineaque manu crepitantia concutit arma. (127-143)

[Last of all arose the age of hard iron: immediately, in this period which took its name from a baser ore, all manner of crime broke out; modesty, truth, and loyalty fled. Treachery and trickery took their place, deceit and violence and criminal greed. Now sailors spread their canvas to the winds, though they had as yet but little knowledge of these, and trees which had once clothed the high mountains were fashioned into ships, and tossed

upon the ocean waves far removed from their own element. The land, which had previously been common to all, like the sunlight and the breezes, was now divided up far and wide by boundaries, set by cautious surveyors. Nor was it only corn and their due nourishment that men demanded of the rich earth: they explored its very bowels, and dug out the wealth which it had hidden away, close to the Stygian shades; and this wealth was a further incitement to wickedness. By this time iron had been discovered, to the hurt of mankind, and gold, more hurtful still than iron. War made its appearance, using both those metals in its conflict, and shaking clashing weapons in bloodstained hands.]

Gower shows his knowledge of this very passage in Book V, when Genius recounts the ‘Tale of Midas’ and his excessive desire for gold. He says:

For this a man mai finde write,
Tofor the time, er gold was smite
In coign, that me the florin knewe,
Ther was welnyh no man untrewē.
Tho was ther nouthē schiled ne spere
Ne dedly wepne for to bere;
Tho was the toun withoute wal,
Which nou is closed overal;
Tho was ther no brocage in londe,
Which nou takth every cause on honde
So mai men knowe, hou the florin
Was moder ferst of malengin
And bringere inne of alle werre,
Wherof this world stant out of herre (CA, V, 333-346)

Gower, via Genius, is unequivocal about the descent into immorality, deceit, and trickery that came after the first forging and smithing of gold. Following the minting of coins there appeared to be no one that was truthful and the coin ‘was moder ferst of malengin’.

‘Malengin’ is a word first used in English by Gower meaning trickery and fraud.⁵⁰³ As Fyler notes with reference to Chaucer that Saturn’s ‘Golden Age has given way to grubbers for gold, the golden letters of Paul’s book to the Yeoman’s crass boast that his Canon “koude al clene ternen” the road to Canterbury “up-so-down, / And pave it al of silver and of gold”’.⁵⁰⁴

The founding of metals then in Book IV is immediately linked to coinage and trade which ultimately taints it. Genius continues in that regard:

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 get it out of myne
And after for to trie and fyne.
And also with gret diligence
Thei founden thilke experience,
Which cleped is alconomie.
Whereof selver multeplie
Thei made and ek the gold also. (CA, IV, 2451-2461)

It was God who put metal in the ground and allowed it to grow under the auspices of nature but it was man, more specifically ‘philosophres’, who managed to remove it from its earthly home. However, these ‘philosophres’ are neither Aristotle nor Plato, I argue, but the word is, instead, used as a term to describe a practitioner of alchemy. Alexander N. Gabrovsky contends that the term ‘philosophre’ implies Chaucer’s specific use of the word to denote an alchemist. He writes ‘Grennen has rightly noted, “the word ‘philosophre’ is a well-establishd equivoque”. In the *Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale*, the word ‘alkmystre’, is, surprisingly used only one time throughout the whole tale, whereas the word ‘philosophre’ is used to denote an alchemist a total of eight times in the tale’.⁵⁰⁵ Therefore, Genius implies that a group of alchemists first came together and devised a

⁵⁰³ MED ‘malengin’ n.

⁵⁰⁴ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.168.

⁵⁰⁵ Alexander N. Gabrovsky, *Chaucer the Alchemist: Physics, Mutability, and the Medieval Imagination* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

way of retrieving the metals from the earth and subsequently extracted the metal from the ore and refined it. It is these ‘philosophres’ that discovered the art of ‘alconomie’. Genius uses this ambiguous term ‘alconomie’ and, as we have seen earlier, it is a word that denotes the science of alchemy as well as having the imitation and false product of such a science implicit in its name. Moreover, Genius remarks that they ‘founden thilke experience’, which simply means they discovered it, but the word ‘experience’ has the semantic range of that which is merely observed with the senses or the sense perceptions thus linking the idea of alchemy and appearance.⁵⁰⁶

‘Alconomie’ is achieved, then, when gold and silver is multiplied, that is its ultimate purpose according to Genius. Fyler explains that the word ‘multiplying’ and its derivatives play a central role in Chaucer’s *Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale*. He writes that ‘its primary meaning in the [tale] is “to practice alchemy”. But words also “multiply”, as one of the entries for *multiplien* in the *Middle English Dictionary* corroborates, and as the Eagle in the *House of Fame* explains (817-21). “Multiplicacioun”, whether of metals or of words, exemplifies the fragmentation and confusion of human experience’.⁵⁰⁷ On top of alluding to the loss of coherence in language and metals, ‘multiplien’ additionally has a meaning of having children, to sexually reproduce, that ineluctable condition of post-lapsarian humankind. Gower’s use of ‘multiplie/multeplie’ is confined in the *Confessio* to that of money and sex.⁵⁰⁸ This sexual aspect is a point that Genius himself would delight in. The narrator of *Le Roman de la Rose* tells us that Nature says⁵⁰⁹:

Genius, dist-ele, biau prestre
 Qui des leus estes diex et mestre,
 Et selonc lor propriétés
 Toutes en euvre les metés
 Et bien acheves la besoingne,
 Si cum à chascun li besoingne. (RR, 16258-63)

⁵⁰⁶ *MED* ‘experience’ n.

⁵⁰⁷ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.172.

⁵⁰⁸ See ‘Multeplie’ for gold/silver in 4.2460; 5.133 and ‘Multeplie/Multiplie’ for sexual reproduction see 5.1651; 5.6423; 8.29. Gower uses the term ‘multiplicacioun/multiplicacion’ to mean an alchemical increase of gold/silver in 4.2573 and to mean mathematical sums in 7.159 and finally to mean sexual generation in 8.29.

⁵⁰⁹ *MED* ‘multiplien’ v. 2 (a).

[‘Genius my fair priest’, she said, ‘you are god and master of the organs of reproduction, setting all to work according to their particular properties and completing the task as appropriate to each’]

A little further on Genius’ entire sermon delivered to the attendant barons is summarised thus:

Ne vous laissiés pas desconfire,
Grefes avés, pensés d’escrire
N’aiés pas les bras emmoflés
Martelés, forgiés et sofiés
[...]
Pensés de vous *monteplier* (RR, 19765-19773)

[Do not allow yourselves to be defeated; you have styluses, so put your mind to using them. Do not keep your arms muffled up: hammer, forge, and blow [...] Concentrate upon *multiplying*.]⁵¹⁰

Genius’ traditional desire for ‘multiplying’, whether verbally, alchemically, or sexually may account for his positive spin here in Gower’s passage on alchemy and all three meanings directly link to the fall of the Golden Age/loss of Paradise. Certainly the presence of Genius himself, as a very symbol of ‘multiplicacioun’, is indicative of the Fall in every way.

Genius then begins a long section attempting to explain how alchemical ‘multiplying’ occurs. He states that there are seven ‘bodies’ or planets and four ‘spirits’. The seven planets are assigned a metal each whose properties they share. Karla Taylor observes that ‘proliferating signs dominate alchemical texts, where gold might masquerade as the sun, or mercury as a dragon, and where any substance or process hides behind layers of cover-names to frustrate the uninitiated’. Indeed these ‘multitudinous cover-names paradoxically grow out of the core philosophical assumption of alchemy: the fundamental unity of all matter. This monoism makes it possible for any red or yellow base metal to stand in for gold, for instance; in the alchemist’s analysis, the shared colour

⁵¹⁰ Emphasis my own.

expresses the essential identity of pyrite (fool's gold) with the noble metal it resembles. The cover-names draw in a universe of resemblances - sun and moon, male and female, gold and silver, sulphur and quicksilver – expressing the unity underlying disparate phenomenal appearances. But the resulting terminological maze is impenetrable without a master to provide the secret key'.⁵¹¹ Genius lists off these hidden signs and resemblances to Amans declaring that gold is 'titled' to the sun, silver assigned to the moon, iron to Mars, lead to Saturn, brass to Jupiter, copper to Venus, and finally quicksilver to Mercury (IV, 2468-2475) and these metals all bear a similarity to the colours of their planetary assignments. The seven bodies and four spirits are identical to those enumerated by Chaucer's Yeoman in his Canon's Yeoman's Tale. The only aberration, however, is that Gower uniquely equates brass with Jupiter whereas Chaucer lists tin and this is assumed by George G. Fox to be a significant error on Gower's part.⁵¹² More alchemical jargon ensues when Genius enumerates the spirits after the bodies. He tells us they are 'after the bok' called 'quickselver', 'sal armoniak', 'sulphur' and 'arcennicum' and with 'blowinge and with fyres hote' they work in diverse ways (CA, IV, 2475-2486). Genius' language gets more technical and his words and terms begin to 'multiplie'. He states that gold and silver are the 'extremities', the two ideals and purest metals that all inferior metals gravitate towards.

Of gold and selver, thei ben hold
 Tuo principal extremities,
 To which all other be degrees
 Of the metalls ben accordant,
 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. (CA, IV, 2488-2497)

⁵¹¹ Karla Taylor, 'Inside Out in Gower's Republic of Letters', pp.171-172.

⁵¹²George G. Fox, *The Mediaeval Sciences*, p.121.

The formula for transmutation and the ‘multiplying’ of gold and silver, according to Genius, can occur if man were to excise the surface rust which causes the metals to grow black and alter the taste and malleability of the metal which ought then to take on, through a natural resemblance, the appearance of gold or silver which is its underlying true essence now that it has been cleaned of impurities. Gower’s use of ‘resemblant’, a word he coined for this section therefore introducing it into English, means ‘similar’⁵¹³ and comes from the Anglo-Norman ‘resembler’⁵¹⁴ meaning to ‘be alike in appearance’ incorporating ‘sembler’ (appearance) into the word itself. It ultimately comes from the Latin root word ‘simulare’ (to copy, imitate). This word plays an important part in this section underlining the idea of exteriority and superficiality. Both ‘savour’ and ‘hardnesse’ equally suggest physicality and are qualities purely subjected to the sense perceptions of the tongue and touch respectively. Likewise, Genius creates a world of surfaces and visible appearances again through the use of ‘likenesse’ meaning the exact same as Gower’s ‘resemblant’ (similarity, resemblance in appearance).⁵¹⁵ The base metals only need to pass the test of the senses of sight, touch, and taste to pass themselves off as the real deal. Indeed, ‘this passage evinces a remarkable faith in appearances’⁵¹⁶ as does the entire art of alchemy itself and Genius emphasises, here to Amans, that these sensory resemblances, these copies can nonetheless portray a true likeness. Theoretically, the art of alchemy potentially allows the exterior and interior to correspond.

Genius persists earnestly in his quest to reveal the secrets of alchemy to Amans. With each step that Genius recounts, however, the processes and language itself become more obscure, and difficult to parse similar to the Canon’s Yeoman. He tells us that for alchemy to ‘worche it sikirly’ (CA, IV, 2498) that ‘in seven forms it is set’ (CA, IV, 2501). These seven different steps are crucial to the success of alchemy, he continues, and that ‘Of alle and if that on be let, / The remenant mai nocht availe’ (CA, IV, 2502-03). If any step is missed or obstructed, the process will not yield up the goods, the whole endeavour will not be profitable nor successful. Alternatively, he says, that if all steps are adhered to then ‘it mai nocht faile / For thei be whom this art was founde’ (CA, IV, 2504-05). Genius is extolling the theory of alchemy here as a possibility in theory but only for those first special discoverers of the art. He further remarks:

⁵¹³ *MED* ‘resemblaunt’ adj.

⁵¹⁴ *AND* ‘resembler’.

⁵¹⁵ *MED* ‘likenesse’ n.

⁵¹⁶ Karla Taylor, ‘Inside Out in Gower’s Republic of Letters’, p.174.

To every point a certain bounde
Ordeignen that a man mai finde
This craft is wrought be weie of kinde
So that ther is no fallas inne.

There are limitations imposed on each step and one may find that the art is generated through the agency of nature which is itself without guile. Just as Amant in *Le Roman de la Rose* does, Genius seems to fully support the theory of successful transmutation because of its connection to nature and natural processes. He warns, with his contrasting conjunctive ‘Bot’, that whomever ‘that thise werk beginne, / He mot awaite at every tyde, / So that nothing be left aside’ (CA, IV, 2510-12). It is imperative that there are no errors, that nothing slips during any of the processes, that there is nothing lost with each step for there to be a successful transmutation. These steps are ‘distillacion’, ‘congelacion’, ‘solucion’, ‘descencion’, ‘sublimation’, ‘calcination’, ‘fixacion’ (CA, IV, 2513-2520). Genius gives no further explanation of his arcane steps and scientific terms here and so Amans is ultimately no nearer to successful alchemical transformation than Gower’s medieval readers or indeed you or I. Genius’ words ‘multiplien’ but become less stable and less understandable as he continues to recite the recipe for alchemy that he has read in ‘olde bokes’. These steps alongside ‘tempred hetes’ and ‘fyr’ (CA, IV, 2521) theoretically should produce the ‘parfit elixir’ (CA, IV, 2522) that is the ‘philosophres ston’ (CA, IV, 2523) which many alchemists have written about. The multiple steps and multitudinous processes lead ultimately to unity and the one marvellous product.

There are two other stones also that ‘clerkes’ (CA, IV, 2528) have made as ‘the bokes it recorden’ (CA, IV 2529). Three in total with Latin scientific names, the first is the ‘lapis vegetabilis’ a curative and salubrious compound whose sole purpose is alleged to promote and preserve man’s health and keep his body from sickness:

The ferst, if I schal specefie,
Was *lapis vegetabilis*,
Of which the propre vertue is
To mannes hele for to serve,
As for to kepe and to preserve
The bodi fro siknesses alle,

Til deth of kinde upon him falle. (CA, IV, 2534-2540)

The second is the ‘*lapis animalis*’ which is again of a medicinal nature and is purported to be responsible for the health of the five senses and ensures that they are working correctly:

The ston seconde I thee behote
Is *lapis animalis* hote
The whos vertu is propre and cowth
For ere and yhe and nase and mouth,
Wherof a man mai hierre and se
And smelle and taste in his degré
And for to fiele and for to go
It helpeth man of bothe tuo.
The wittes fyvve he underfongeth
To kepe, as it to him belongeth. (CA, IV, 2541-2550)

These two passages are the only time that Genius uses Latin words throughout the *Confessio*. This at once underlines the untranslatability of alchemical texts, processes, and ingredients but also calls attention to Genius’ vernacularization of the alchemical process, his own addition to *translatio studii*, and as we shall see, his participation in another stage of its failure. The third stone, called ‘Minerall’, is by far the most important and has the miraculous power to purify and transform metals into their desired state: gold and silver.

The thridde ston in special
Be name is cleped minerall,
Which the metalls of every mine
Attempreth, til that thei ben fyne,
And pureth hem be such a weie,
That al the vice goth aweie
Of rust, of stink, and of hardnesse.
And whanne thei ben of such clenness,
This mineral, so as I finde,

Transformeth al the ferste kynde
And makth hem able to conceive
Thurgh his vertu, and to receive
Both in substance and in figure
Of gold and selver the nature.⁵¹⁷ (CA, IV, 2551-2564)

Genius, again, stresses the importance of transformation and utilizes the language of betterment and reformation to express the process of transmutation.⁵¹⁸ The ‘philosophres ston’ also called ‘minerall’ is mixed with all the metals in the mine which refines and purifies them in such a way that the surface flaws or ‘vices’ such as ‘rust’, ‘stink’, and ‘hardnesse’ are removed. When these defects of appearance have been removed from the metals then this stone has the power to somehow transform the metals’ nature so that they are able to receive the internal and external qualities, the substance and appearance of gold and silver, the ideal of all metals. It is, as Karla Taylor notes, ‘the science at once of face value and transformation’.⁵¹⁹ It promises integrity and reliability of reference, the elusive bond between ‘forme’ and ‘matiere’. Alchemy offers the perfect analogy for the possibility of a harmonious relationship between inner and outer, a flawless correspondence between signified and signifier.

Genius, like Amant in *Le Roman de la Rose*, fully commits to a belief in the theory of alchemical transmutation. Just like Amant he observes that it is a ‘true art’ commenting ‘The science of himself is trewe / Upon the forme as it was founded’ (CA, IV, 2598-9). Yet, significantly, he pronounces that contemporary practical alchemy is no longer possible interjecting with his much favoured contrasting conjunctive ‘Bot’ he says ‘now it stant al otherwise’ (CA, IV, 2580). According to R.F. Yeager the problem is linguistic, at least superficially. The antique texts “‘Of Grek, of Arabe and of Caldee” (CA, IV, 2627) exist, but can no longer be deciphered’ due to a type of intellectual sloth.⁵²⁰ This neatly fits with Gower's *ordinatio* of the seven deadly sins as Gower’s alchemical passage occurs within Book IV which is solely dedicated to the sin of sloth. The problem is certainly linguistic, but I would argue that it is a problem of the decay of post-lapsarian cognition and language propounded by the steady decline of both associated with

⁵¹⁷Emphasis my own.

⁵¹⁸ For an analysis of the moral language of this passage see Clare Fletcher “‘The science of himself is trewe”: Alchemy in John Gower's “Confessio Amantis””, *South Atlantic Review*, 79.3-4 (2015), 118-131.

⁵¹⁹ Karla Taylor, ‘Inside Out in Gower’s Republic of Letters’, p.174.

⁵²⁰ R.F. Yeager, *John Gower’s Poetic*, p.167.

translatio imperii and *translatio studii*. Moreover, the Tower of Babel as depicted in Genesis 11. 1-9 introduced confusion, division, and multiplicity into speech and John Fyler notes in what seems like a reversal of the alchemical process that ‘language has decomposed as part of a general decay, its original unity disintegrating into fungible particles’, the one has become multiple.⁵²¹ ‘But now it stant al otherwise’, Gower writes, ‘Thei speken faste of thilke ston, / Bot hou to mak it, nou wot non’ (CA, IV, 2580-82). Gower’s contemporaries actively converse about the ‘philosopher’s stone’ but none possess knowledge of the true nature or essence of the thing itself. The ‘signifier’, therefore, and the ‘signified’ have become estranged and the relationship has thus been contaminated. They know the name but cognisance of the object has perished with the decline of language and the world. *Verba* and *res* are no longer ‘cousins’ and perfect referential integrity has been lost. Inner and outer do not reflect each other in a post-lapsarian world and alchemy, like the verbal sign, which hinges on the correct correlation of interior and exterior suffers greatly.

Genius highlights the textuality of alchemy by naming its famous authors. He tells Amans:

Of whom if I the names calle,
 Hermes was on the ferst of alle
 To whom this art is most applied;
 Geber therof was magnefied
 And Ortolan and Morien,
 Among the whiche is Avicen,
 Which fond and wrot a gret partie
 The practique of Alconomie;
 Whos bokes, pleinli as thei stonde (CA, IV, 2605-13)

These authors no doubt cover the languages of ‘Grek, Arabe and Caldee’ (CA, IV 2627) and once again Genius roots the beginning of alchemy in a pagan fictional setting by invoking Hermes. Although the name ‘Hermes’ more probably refers to Hermes Trismegistus the ambiguity here could suggest Hermes the Greek god, whom Homer and Hesiod portrayed as the author of skilled or deceptive acts. The two were quite often

⁵²¹ Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, p.43.

mixed up and Hermes has his Roman counterpart as Mercury the god of commerce and eloquence.

These authors and their texts further the idea of learning and *translatio studii* which has additionally declined with the fall of man and the world's subsequent deterioration becoming corrupted with its move from the east to the west, from Babylon, to Persia, to Greece, to Rome and France and Germany. Richard de Bury writes in his *Philobiblon* 'that... [the moderni] are barely capable of discussing the discoveries of their forerunners, and acquiring those things as pupils which the ancients [antiqui] dug out by difficult efforts of discovery'.⁵²² These ancient texts of 'Of Grek, of Arabe and of Caldee' (CA, IV, 2627) are indeed indecipherable and crucially Gower is pointing us to the consequences of the Fall and the decline of language and the world as the true cause of the inaccessibility of successful alchemy.

Genius further states that

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;
The forme of wordes thei it tret,
But yit they failen of begete. (CA, IV, 2614-19).

Modern alchemists understand only the 'forme of wordes' and neither the crucial 'matiere' signifier nor the signified and language here is no longer 'lich to the conceite / Withoute semblant of deceite' (CA, Prologue, 113-14) as Gower notes in the Prologue. Substance and appearance are separated and there is a stark difference, indeed an irreparable chasm, between the language of the alchemical texts and the practice itself, the difference between 'understonde' and 'assai', between 'forme of wordes' and 'begete', 'word' and 'deed'. Genius remarks that the contemporary world is ignorant of the meaning of the art and its writings. They 'know litel' and cannot discern the truth in any certain manner instead being forced to speculate (weene) about the art's true

⁵²²Richard de Bury, *Philobiblon*, 9, ed. Michael Maclagan, trans. E.C. Thomas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1970), p.99.

significance. Because of this inability to understand and find linguistic truth in alchemical texts in the contemporary world, Genius declares that the modern alchemist is doomed to failure:

Thei setten upon thilke dede,
And spille more than thei spede;
For allewey thei finde a lette,
Which bringeth in poverté and dette
To hem that riche were afore. (CA, IV, 2585-2589)

He tells us that ‘with gret diligence’ (CA, IV, 25840), with immense labour, they set about practicing this art but they lose much more than they gain and are constantly foiled by unknown hindrances or obstructions. This brings only poverty and debt to those who once had riches before. Now they experience only failure. He continues

The lost is had, the lucre is lore,
To gete a pound thei spenden fyve;
I not hou such a craft shchal thryve
In the manere as it is used:
It were betre be refused
Than for to worchen upon weene
In thing which stant nocht as thei weene. (CA, IV, 2585-2596)

Everything is lost by the modern alchemist. As the Canon’s Yeoman remarks, he spends vast amounts more than he ever gets in return. Indeed, the whole endeavour appears to be a complete sham. Genius declares that it is better to just refuse it than be subject to its punishments of failure. Certainly it is better to reject it than to work off of expectations of a thing that does not deliver what it promises. The rhyme riche of ‘weene’, expectation versus promise, further widens the gap between, verbum and res, word and conceit.

Karla Taylor writes that ‘alchemy, in short, promises that the face of nature can be made plainly legible’⁵²³ and indeed the alchemist attempts to ‘copy’ the ‘Book of Nature’ itself but in a post-lapsarian world ‘scribal’ errors abound. Gower tells us in the opening heading to Book V of the *Confessio* that ‘Ostat auaricia nature legibus, et que’ [Avarice obstructs the laws of nature] (CA, V, i). Certainly, Gower views vice as corrupting the signs of nature. Importantly, Gower’s alchemical excursus comes in the context of the provenance and evolution of human labour as a counter to sloth. Labour is an overwhelmingly post-lapsarian concept and thus Gower’s introduction of it here is strikingly evocative of the fallen world, its manifestations and consequential punishments.⁵²⁴ The *locus classicus*, of course, is Genesis 3 17-19:

Ad Adam vero dixit quia audisti vocem uxoris tuae et comedisti de ligno ex quo praeceperam tibi ne comederes maledicta terra in opere tuo in laboribus comedes eam cunctis diebus vitae tuae. Spinis et tribulos germinabit tibi et comedes herbas terrae. In sudore vultus tui vesceris pane donec revertaris in terram de qua sumptus es quia pulvis es et in pulverem reverteris.⁵²⁵

[And to Adam he said: Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee, that thou shouldst not eat, cursed is the earth in thy work: with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee, and thou shalt eat the herbs of the earth. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread till thou return to the earth out of which thou wast taken: for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return]

Adam and Eve’s expulsion from Paradise impels God to command Adam to toil for the rest of his life but crucially as further punishment curses the very earth on which Adam labours. Before Adam’s fall the world and nature was young, burgeoning and it was a

⁵²³ Karla Taylor, ‘Inside Out in Gower’s Republic of Letters’, p.176.

⁵²⁴ Irvin, like Batkie, sees the importance of labour to this section but argues that ‘the Fall, pagan or Christian, is nowhere to be found’, Irvin, p.198.

⁵²⁵ Latin text taken from St Jerome’s Latin Vulgate Bible and the translations are taken from the King James Bible both found here <<http://www.latinvulgate.com>> [accessed December 21st 2016].

time of fecundity and efflorescence. John Lydgate writes of Paradise in his *Fall of Princes* that:

Ther was such plente off plesance and off grace,
That everi spice, herbe, greyn and roote
Wer founde growyng in that gardeyn soote...
The hair was cleene from al corrupcioun,
For ther engendrid was no maladie. (FoP, Book 1)⁵²⁶

The post-lapsarian world, on the other hand, was one of terrestrial decay and ageing or *senectus mundi*. The *senectus mundi* theory was first propounded by the early Christian writer Cyprian in his *Ad Demetrianum*.⁵²⁷ St Augustine, later, taught that there were six ages of man⁵²⁸ and used these ages to illustrate the ages of the world in *De civitate Dei*.⁵²⁹ He further compared the ageing process of man to that of the world, an analogy that sprung from the hypothetical correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm.⁵³⁰ Augustine writes:

Do you wonder that the world is failing? Wonder that the world is grown old. It is as a man who is born, and grows up, and waxes old. There are many complaints in old age; the cough, the rheum, the weakness of the eyes, fretfulness, and weariness. So then as when a man is old; he is full of complaints; so is the world old; and is full of troubles. Is it a little thing that God has done for you, in that in the world's old age, He has sent Christ unto you, that He may renew you then, when all is failing? (Sermon XXXI, 8)

According to James Dean, this theory was a governing trope of late-medieval literature and states that the physical earth had deteriorated over the course of time and humanity had thus become increasingly corrupt and evil. The defining element is that mankind's

⁵²⁶ John Lydgate, *The Fall of Princes*, ed. Henry Bergen (London: Early English Text Society, 1924).

⁵²⁷ Cyprian, *Ad Demetrianum*, ed. M. Simonetti (Turnhout: Brepols 2010), 3.

⁵²⁸ St Augustine, 'De catechizandis rudibu', 22, *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6, trans. R.G. MacMullen, ed. Philip Schaff (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1888).

⁵²⁹ St Augustine, 'De Civitate Dei', 10:14, 16:43, 22:30, *Nicene Fathers*.

⁵³⁰ St Augustine, 'Sermon XXXI', 8, *Nicene Fathers*.

moral failings have both brought about and perpetuated the decline, the ageing process.⁵³¹ This original sin and cursed earth constituted the first stage in the world's degeneration and the world subsequently continues to decline thereafter. He notes further that in medieval literature:

Adam's six (or seven) sins were sometimes harmonized with the six ages of man, as if the sins brought on the ageing process: Adam - mankind-sinned so his physical condition ever after would progress through the stages and eventually decline.⁵³²

Dean writes that 'as the world has grown old, the very building blocks of the universe - earth, water, air, and fire - have become old, corrupted, and polluted'.⁵³³ Zosimus, the late-third and early fourth-century Alexandrian alchemical writer, was of the opinion that the name 'Adam' symbolized the four elements, which correspond to the four cardinal points of the earth. Olympiodorus, a sixth-century Alexandrian neo-Platonic author, considered Adam the first man to have been the issue of the four elements and later in the thirteenth century, Vincent of Beauvais asserted that Adam was in fact the first teacher of alchemy.⁵³⁴ Hence, the further away from Adam and Paradise that society and individual man moves the more corrupt the alchemical process, knowledge and elemental material becomes and this deterioration of the four elements in union with the loss of virtue in particular is strongly iterated by Gower in *Mirour de l'Omme* when he writes:

Qant il son dieu fait coroucer,
Par son pecché devient inmonde
La proprete du tout le monde,
C'est fieu et air et terre et mer,
Trestous le devont comparer;
Siqu'ils commencent aduerser
Au beste q'ensi les confonde. (MO, 26811-26817)

⁵³¹ Dean, *The World Grown Old*, p.1.

⁵³² Dean, *The World Grown Old*, pp.42-43.

⁵³³ Dean, *The World Grown Old*, p.83.

⁵³⁴ R. Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists: A History and Source Book* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp.18-19.

[When he angers his God, the quality of all the world is defiled through his sin. Fire, air, land, and sea all have to suffer, so that they begin to be hostile to the beast that thus brings them to ruin.]

This decline of nature and the world, alongside the loss of meaning in language, accounts for the alchemists' fruitless labour and inability to succeed. 'For allewey thei finde a lette' (CA, IV, 2587), Gower writes, because modern alchemists' natural ingredients are themselves diseased and flawed. The inherent nature and delicate balance between the qualities of the Aristotelian four elements - earth, air, fire and water, has been disturbed through the deterioration of mankind and its material surroundings. In the Prologue Gower makes this explicit:

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.
And for to se the propreté
Of every thyng in his degree. (CA, Prologue, 918-930)

And again in *Mirour de l'Omme* Gower fully echoes this sentiment of mankind's inseparable moral correlation to nature:

Pour ce si l'omme a dieu forsfait,
Par son pecché trestout desfait
Et terre et eaue et mer et fieu ;
Car dieus se venge du mesfait,
Et leur nature ensi retrait

Q'ils pour le temps sont comme perdu. (MO, 26053-58)

[Therefore if man transgresses against God, he undoes everything by his sin – earth, and water, and sea, and fire. And God avenges the misdeed and withdraws their nature so that they are for some time as if lost.]

Through mankind's fall from virtue the very elements encapsulated in the 'great golden chain of being' are at risk resulting in an upending, an overturning of the ordained hierarchy which constantly threatens to break apart the fabric of the world. Indeed, Gower declares in the *Mirour de l'Homme* that he is also to blame for the decay of his contemporary world:

Car deinz mon euer tresbien je sens
Qe ma resoun et mes cink sens
Ay despendu si folement,
Q'encontre dieu et son defens
Le siecle ove tous les elemens
Ay corrupu vileinement (MO, 27313-18)

[For in my heart I feel that I have squandered my reason and my five senses so foolishly that (contrary to God's prohibition) I have basely corrupted the world together with all the elements.]

'But now it stant al otherwise' equally suggests a reversal of things, a turning upside down and readily recalls Gower's lament the post-lapsarian condition that 'the world is changed overal' (119) in the Prologue. Indeed, Gower says exactly this in the Latin heading to Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the deterioration of the civilizations of the world: 'Mundus in euentu versatur ut alea casu' [The world is overturned in its outcomes as a die in a toss] and later in this section he writes 'hou that this world schal torne and wende / Til it befalle to his ende' (CA, Prologue 591-92). The prevalence of illustration of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in the Gower manuscripts, as Russell Peck has noted⁵³⁵, strongly attests to its thematic importance to Gower's overall poetic. The Babylonian

⁵³⁵Russell Peck, ed., *Confessio Amantis*, Vol. 1, p.237.

King's dream of the composite statue of man here, taken from the biblical story in Daniel 2 19-45, is made of a head and neck of gold, chest, shoulders and arms of silver, stomach and thighs of brass, legs of steel, and finally feet of steel and clay. The Latin marginalia to this section consistently replaces 'stiel' with 'iron' and perhaps Gower's use of the word steel was chosen simply for rhyming purposes as iron is more likely meant. Gower expands on the biblical story, which references only political kingdoms or empires. Here, in Gower's version, Daniel's exposition introduces a clear moral dimension explicated through metallurgic language:

And seide him that figure strange
Betokneth how the world schal change
And waxe lasse worth and lasse,
Til it noght al overpasse.
The necke and hed, that weren golde,
He seide how that betokne scholde
A worthi world, a noble, a riche,
To which non after schal be liche.
Of selver that was overforth
Schal ben a world of lasse worth;
And after that the wombe of bras
Tokne of a werse world it was.
The stiel which he syh afterward,
A world betokneth more hard.
Bot yet the werste of everydel
Is last, whan that of erthe and stiel
He syh the feet departed so,
For that betokneth mochel wo. (CA, Prologue, 627-643)

Daniel describes an entropic theory of history and how the world is increasingly becoming worse off and thereby lists the stages of degeneration through metals of declining value. He shows how each era will decline in nobility and worth by tracing it from the noblest and most perfect metal - gold, through silver, then brass and then iron (stiel) the metal with the least worth in this scheme. It is alchemy in reverse. Whereas alchemy seeks to remove the vices and contaminants, here vices have been slowly added

to each subsequent age. Each era is more adulterated than the last, from the head of gold to the feet of steel and clay which readily recalls Gower's earlier statement in the Prologue 'Tho was the vertu sett above / And vice was put under fote' (CA, Prologue, 116-17). Indeed, Gower is pointing us towards his alchemical passage here through his use of the metal 'brass', which immediately calls to mind his unique Jupiter-dominant metal enumerated in his list of alchemical bodies in Book IV. Boccaccio laments in *De Mulieribus Claris* that with civilization come vices⁵³⁶ and the anonymous author of the thirteenth-century 'Vulgate commentary to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*' uses a similar coalescence of metallurgic and moral language when he writes that:

Figurally, [...] the first age was golden because men of this age adhered to virtues, but from day to day they degenerated into vices, which is indicated by the latter ages. *Golden*. There are ten kinds of metals by which the Sybil wished to designate ten ages. The first age is figured as golden because, as gold is worth more than other metals, so the first age surpassed the others in goodness. The names of the metals are as follows: gold, silver, copper, amber, *brass*, bronze, tin, lead, inferior bronze, iron.⁵³⁷

Andrew Galloway convincingly argues that Gower read, studied and intellectually absorbed the 'Vulgate commentary'⁵³⁸ and I, therefore, suggest that Gower's inclusion of the word 'brass' in his alchemical section is likely to be influenced by this passage. Frank Coulson writes that twelfth-century commentators distinguish 'six ages of man' figured in degenerating metals: 'aurum, [gold] argentum [silver], es [bronze], cuprum [copper], stagnum [tin], ferrum [iron]'.⁵³⁹ Gower himself draws on the theory of microcosm/macrocosm when he writes in the Latin heading to Nebuchadnezzar's dream that 'sicut ymago viri variantur tempora mundi' [like an image of man do the ages of the world vary].

⁵³⁶ Giovanni Boccaccio, *Concerning Famous Women*, trans. Guido A. Guarino (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1963).

⁵³⁷ Frank T. Coulson, ed., *The 'Vulgate' Commentary on Ovid's Metamorphoses: The Creation Myth and the Story of Orpheus*, Toronto Medieval Latin Texts 20, (Toronto, 1991), p.85, emphasis my own.

⁵³⁸ Andrew Galloway, 'Gower's Ovids', unpublished conference paper at: III International Congress of the John Gower Society, 30 June-3 July, 2014, University of Rochester, New York.

⁵³⁹ Coulson, *The 'Vulgate' Commentary*, p.85.

For Gower, the specifically human image of the statue of Nebuchadnezzar's dream is wholly symbolic of man's disordered, sinful state mirrored in the macrocosm of the declining physical natural world. In Gower's fourteenth-century interpretation of Daniel the head of gold or golden age represents the empire of Babylon from Nebuchadnezzar, the Chaldean king, to Cyrus of Persia; the stomach of silver concerns Cyrus to the Macedonian king Alexander the Great; the age of brass of the stomach and thighs represents the time from Alexander to Julius Emperor of the Romans; the age of iron or the legs is from Julius Caesar until Charlemagne the king of the Franks; and the final age is Gower's current world, the feet divided, a post-Roman-empire, which began with the German king Otto. The Latin marginalia is implicit in its insistence that the current age is the worst and most chaotic:

De seculo nouissimis iam temporibus ad similitudinem pedum in discordiam lapso et diviso [...] Et ab illo regno incipiente divisio per vniuersum orbem in posteros concreuit, vnde nos ad alterutrum diuisi huius seculi consummacionem iam vltimi expectamus

[Concerning the age of the most recent times, in the likeness of the feet, fallen and divided in discord [...] And from the inception of this kingdom [Otto], division hardened through the whole world for subsequent generations, whence we expect from one or the other of the divisions the end of this present, last age.]

The statue of man that Nebuchadnezzar dreams of comes to represent man's fall from Paradise and continued degeneration on a grander scale. It demonstrates the steady decline of the world brought about by *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii* as one political empire descends disastrously into the next. These are worlds directly impacted by Babel and its subsequent dispersal of peoples. With the resulting alienation from each other they are continuously at war in an effort to conquer and subdue the other. It is an unstable world that Gower found himself centrally placed in but a mere ten years before he wrote these lines. This decline, importantly, also constituted the corruption of learning and scholarship from the eastern empires to the west; and facilitated the deterioration of language and cognition. Gower frames his Nebuchadnezzar around a semiotic failure. The king fails to understand the signs and symbols of his own dream and is subsequently

punished by God with a type of biblical version of *contrapasso*, when he is transmuted into a grass-eating beast. The mention of Babylon and the Chaldeans equally conjures up its most infamous citizen Nimrod and the creation of the Tower of Babel and Baltazaar or Belshazaar quite literally in Daniel 5 cannot comprehend the word of God in the story of the writing on the wall. Thus through Gower's alchemical language in this passage he helps to link the failed practice of alchemy to the *translatio imperii/translation studii* and its resultant decline of the world and language.

Gower's alchemical exposition, in the modern world, stands as a stark reminder of the fallen world, the natural world in decay and its elemental impotence due to the decline of virtue in man. In theory, the art of alchemy offers up a seamless analogy, for Gower, of the potential for a perfect correspondence between inner and outer, signified and signifier that language can aspire to. But through that same analogy, Gower reveals the utter impossibility of such a correspondence in the contemporary post-lapsarian world. The continual and unabating processes of *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii* have lent a hand in the disappearance of true knowledge of the alchemical arts. As a result of all these factors alchemy and post-lapsarian language are, for Gower, both fable.

In the next chapter I turn to elements of *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii* again, but this time I move closer to Gower's shores with the fraught and suspicious interrelationships between the Latin Roman Empire and the Anglo-Saxons in the 'Tale of Constance' of Book II and that of the Latinate figures of Brutus, Carmente, and the Anglo-Saxon Hengist in the Prologue and Frame Narrative.

V: 'BOT EVERE KEP THI TUNGE STILLE'

Though only two-thirds of the length of Nicholas Trevet's Old French version *Of the Noble Lady Constance*, Gower's much shortened adaptation, nonetheless, stands at one thousand and five lines and constitutes the second longest tale of the *Confessio Amantis* (with the most protracted being 'The Tale of Apollonius' in Book VIII). Gower revises Trevet's 'sawe' (CA, II, 588) to fit Genius' account of 'Detraccioun' which comes under the heading of Envy which governs all of Book II. Gower remarks in the preceding Latin heading that 'Invidie pars est detraccio pessima' [The worst part of Envy is Detraction] that is the unjust tarnishing of the good name of a person through word of mouth. Thus the sin of Envy has a very clear verbal aspect to it, as does Gower's 'Tale of Constance', and even further it has an overwhelming graphic physicality to it. Gower inserts numerous images of orality throughout this section writing as a description of detraction as that 'Que magis infamem flatibus *oris* agit' [which stirs up a plague of infamy with the gustings of the *mouth*] and that '*Lingua* venenato sermone repercutit auras' [The *tongue* resounds in the air with poisonous speech]. He writes '*Morsibus* a tergo quos inficit ipsa fideles / Vulneris ignoti sepe salute carent' [The faithful ones whom she inflicts unawares with *bites* from the back often lack a medicine for the wound].⁵⁴⁰ The allusions to the mouth, the teeth, and the tongue moreover recall Gower's opening Latin heading in the Prologue of the *Confessio*, when he anxiously pleads against detraction and misinterpretation and that the '*Ossibus* ergo carens que conterit ossa loquelis / Absit' [boneless one that breaks bones with speeches be absent]. This sentiment is repeated with some of the very same language in the *Vox Clamantis* when he writes:

Dicere qui poterit quot in ethere lumina lucent,
Pauaque quot siccus corpora puluis habet,
Vix satis est sapiens homo talis ut omnia dicat
Semina pestifera que mala lingua serit
Nemo referre potest malo que linguosus in urbe

⁵⁴⁰ Emphasis my own.

Parturit, et duplo provocat ore dolos.

Res mala lingua loquax, res pecor, pessima res est,

Que quanuis careat ossibus, ossa terit (VC, V, 915-922)

[The man who can tell how many stars shine in the heavens and how many tiny bodies the dry dust contains is scarcely wise enough to tell all the pestiferous seeds an evil tongue sows. No one can relate the evils that a prattler brings about in the city and the sufferings he causes with his deceitful tongue. A prattling tongue is a bad thing, a worse thing, and the worst thing, however much it may lack bones itself, it can break bones.]

Thus the evil boneless tongue that so dominates the *Confessio*'s 'incipit' and the venomous all-devouring and backbiting mouth that haunts Constance come to epitomise Gower's understanding of the sin of detraction. In the *Mirour* Gower tells us that 'Le souffle au bouche detrahant / C'est le man vent du Babilent' [The blowing of the detracting mouth is the ill wind of Babylon] (MO, 2857 -58). Here Gower firmly links detraction, the sin of *Malebouche*, and by proxy the *Confessio Amantis* itself, to the post-lapsarian linguistic chaos and verbal division that occurred at Babel. And lying in the background of this biblical allusion is, of course, the post-lapsarian corruption of the *signum*. In this chapter I argue that semiotic fraudulence and the 'wicke tunge' is at the heart of both the Tale of Constance in Book II and the Prologue and Framing Narrative. I will further argue that the tales are linked thematically as, Gower moves away from the external word altogether towards silence and a 'tunge stille' (CA, II, 553).

TALE OF CONSTANCE

'The Tale of Constance' opens with a description of 'a worthi kniht in Cristes lawe / Of grete Rome' (CA, II, 587-588) called 'Tiberie Constantin' (CA, II, 590). Thus the tale begins with a direct allusion to the Incarnation and the *Logos* made flesh with the reference to 'Cristes lawe'. Gower elsewhere in the *Confessio* refers to this as the 'Newe

Lawe'⁵⁴¹ as does Thomas Aquinas in his *Summa Theologica*. Aquinas defines the New Law as 'Et ideo principaliter lex nova est ipsa gratia spiritus sancti, quae datur Christi fidelibus'[chiefly the grace itself of the Holy Ghost, which is given to those who believe in Christ] (ST, [38253] I^a-IIae q. 106 a. 1 co), but adds that it also 'Habet tamen lex nova quaedam sicut dispositiva ad gratiam spiritus sancti, et ad usum huius gratiae pertinentia' [contains certain things that dispose us to receive the grace of the Holy Ghost, and pertaining to the use of that grace] (ST, [38253] I^a-IIae q. 106 a. 1 co). Therefore, 'Et ideo dicendum est quod principaliter nova lex est lex indita, secundario autem est lex scripta' [the New Law is in the first place a law that is inscribed on our hearts, but that secondarily it is a written law] (ST, [38253] I^a-IIae q. 106 a. 1 co). Aquinas asserts the supremacy of the internal spiritual effect of Grace, the impression on the heart, over the external textual sign, writing further:

[...] ad legem Evangelii duo pertinent. Unum quidem principaliter, scilicet ipsa gratia spiritus sancti interius data. Et quantum ad hoc, nova lex iustificat. Unde Augustinus dicit, in libro de spiritu et littera, ibi, scilicet in veteri testamento, lex extrinsecus posita est, qua iniusti terrerentur, hic, scilicet in novo testamento, intrinsecus data est, qua iustificarentur. Aliud pertinet ad legem Evangelii secundario, scilicet documenta fidei, et praecepta ordinantia affectum humanum et humanos actus. Et quantum ad hoc, lex nova non iustificat. Unde apostolus dicit, II ad Cor. III, littera occidit, spiritus autem vivificat. Et Augustinus exponit, in libro de spiritu et littera, quod per litteram intelligitur quaelibet Scriptura extra homines existens, etiam moralium praeceptorum qualia continentur in Evangelio. Unde etiam littera Evangelii occideret, nisi adesset interius gratia fidei sanans. ([38261] I^a-IIae q. 106 a. 2 co)⁵⁴²

⁵⁴¹ See 2.3432 'the ground of al the Newe Lawe'; 5.1779 'Thurgh baptesme of the newe lawe' and the term 'Cristes Lawe' is again used in 'The Tale of Constance' at 2.769 'And seide, 'In trust of Cristes Lawe'.

⁵⁴² St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, <<http://www.corpusthomisticum.org/sth2106.html>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

[[...] there is a twofold element in the Law of the Gospel. There is the chief element, viz. the grace of the Holy Ghost bestowed inwardly. And as to this, the New Law justifies. Hence Augustine says (De Spir. et Lit. xvii): “There,” i.e. in the Old Testament, “the Law was set forth in an outward fashion, that the ungodly might be afraid”; “here,” i.e. in the New Testament, “it is given in an inward manner, that they may be justified.” The other element of the Evangelical Law is secondary: namely, the teachings of faith, and those commandments which direct human affections and human actions. And as to this, the New Law does not justify. Hence the Apostle says (2 Corinthians 3:6) “The letter killeth, but the spirit quickeneth”: and Augustine explains this (De Spir. et Lit. xiv, xvii) by saying that the letter denotes any writing external to man, even that of the moral precepts such as are contained in the Gospel. Wherefore the letter, even of the Gospel would kill, unless there were the inward presence of the healing grace of faith.]⁵⁴³

Indeed, the very difference between the Old Law of Moses and the New Law of Christ in the New Testament is the difference between external and internal as Aquinas writes:

[...] legem novam et veterem unus Deus dedit, sed aliter et aliter. Nam legem veterem dedit scriptam in tabulis lapideis, legem autem novam dedit scriptam in tabulis cordis carnalibus, ut apostolus dicit, II ad Cor. III. (ST, [38264] I^a-IIae q. 106 a. 2 ad 3)

[[...] The same God gave both the New and the Old Law, but in different ways. For He gave the Old Law written on tables of stone: whereas He gave the New Law written “in the fleshly tables of the heart,” as the Apostle expresses it (2 Corinthians 3:3).]

⁵⁴³ St Thomas Aquinas, *The Summa Theologiae of St. Thomas Aquinas*, trans Fathers of the English Dominican Province, Second and Revised Edition, 1920, <<http://www.newadvent.org/summa/2106.htm>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

Therefore, Gower's specific reference to 'Cristes Lawe' at the outset of 'The Tale of Constance' notifies us of the importance of 'The Gift of Grace' to the story but also through Aquinas' and Augustine's definition of the 'New Lawe' that is chiefly the grace itself of the Holy Spirit, which is inscribed only internally and not present in the external textual or verbal sign. It additionally sets Constance apart in her Christianity from the opposing laws of Islam and Heathen laws that will equally play a part in this tale.

Having set the timeframe in a post-lapsarian, post-incarnation Roman Empire, which does not appear in Trivet's account,⁵⁴⁴ Genius describes Constantine as possessing the rightful and lawful external sign of kingship 'The sceptre hadde for to rihte' (CA, II, 589) thereby introducing the world of the *signum* into the tale and further underscoring, at this early stage, the importance of the theme of signification to the overall story. Moreover, it appears fitting that the very first *signum* presented is a symbol of temporal rule or *temporalia*, particularly when signs themselves are temporal entities as Augustine maintains and which Aquinas supports in his contrasting of the internal and external aspects of 'Cristes Lawe'. Genius conveys that Constantine is married to 'Ytalie' which, of course, references the geographic nation of Italy⁵⁴⁵, where the tale is initially set, but also offers links back to the 'worthi kniht [...] of grete Rome' (CA, II, 587-88) and also perhaps could be seen as hinting at the idea of the Roman Empire and its Latinate culture and language merging with the vernacular Italian. Chaucer insinuates such a proposition in his own version of the story in the Man of Law's Tale when he writes of Custance 'A

⁵⁴⁴ In Trivet's version there is no specific set location, the reader simply received a time clause: 'taunt come il governa la court et les provinces de l'empire souz l'emperour Justin' [when he (Tiberius) governed the court and provinces of the empire under the Emperor Justin] (NLC, 10-11).

⁵⁴⁵ 'Italia', the ancient name of the Italian peninsula, which is also eponymous of the modern republic, originally applied only to a part of what is now Southern Italy. Dante in the fourteenth century wrote that the borders of what is geographically and historically called 'Italia' are clearly defined in the north by the Alps (from the Vare river near Montecarlo to the Arsa River in Istria) and, going down the Italian peninsula, in the south by Sicily and its islands (DVE 1.8.8-9, 10.7; Inf 9.113-114. 20.62-63; Par 8.61-63). Richard Lansing writes: 'Conforming with the chorography of the time, exemplified by the map associated with Pietro Vesconte (1321), Dante's Italy spans the peninsula from west to east. It is crossed by the Apennines, *lo dosso d'Italia* ("the back of Italy", Purg. 30.86), which divide it into two sides. On the right Italy borders the Tyrrhenian Sea, and on the left the Adriatic. Dante seems to believe that these two seas converge in the Straits of Messina; he thus appears to preclude the existence of the Ionian Sea, which he never mentions. The geographic limits of Italy are determined almost entirely by linguistic criteria: they extend to wherever the Italian vernacular is spoken. Indeed, Italy is the *bel paese là dove 'l sì suona* ("the lovely land where sì is spoken," Inf 33.80), and the Italians are the ones *qui sì dicunt* ("who say sì, DVE 1.88) or the ones who speak the *volgare di sì* ("vernacular of sì," Conv. 1.10.12). The interconnection between Italy and its vernacular is not only spatial/quantitative, but also cultural/qualitative', *The Dante Encyclopedia*, ed. Richard Lansing (London: Routledge, 2010), p.529.

maner Latyn corrupt was hir speche' (MoLT, 519) which could allude to the admixture of Latin and the vernacular Italian as many scholars have argued.⁵⁴⁶ We are told, by Genius, that Constantine and Ytalie have together produced only one child, a 'maide' (CA, II, 593). Genius does not immediately reveal this 'maide's' name but instead declares 'That al the wide worldes fame / Spak worschip of hire goode name' (CA, II, 595-596). In Trivet's version, he names the girl straight away 'Cist Tyberie [...] engendra (fol. 63a) de sa femme Ytalie une fille apelé Constance' [This Tiberius [...] begot on his wife Italy a daughter named Constance].⁵⁴⁷ In Chaucer's adaptation, the Man of Law reveals her name within one line of the introduction of her existence 'And so bifel that th'excellent renoun / Of the Emperoures doghter, dame Custance' (MoLT, 150 -151). In contrast, it takes Gower five whole lines since introducing Constance's presence to disclose her name. This delay is unique to Gower and integral to his version of the tale. Gower, in addition, chooses to deviate from his Anglo-Norman source by not giving the girl's age (thirteen) and importantly excluding Constance's vast education in the seven liberal arts and great skill with languages. Trivet in comparison writes:

[...] pur ceo a grant diligence la fist enseigner la foi Cristiene, et endoctriner par mestres sachantz en les sept sciences, qe sount logiciene, naturele, morale, astronomie, geometrie, musique, perspective, que sont philosophies, seculers apelez, et la fist endoctriner en diverses langages.

[...] great diligence he [Tiberius] had her taught the Christian faith and instructed by learned masters in the seven sciences, which are logic,

⁵⁴⁶ J.A. Burrow argues that the phrase 'corrupt Latyn' was used throughout the middle ages to characterize the language of late antiquity in 'A Maner Latyn Corrupt', *Medium Aevum*, 30 (1961) 33-37 (p.34). H.J. Chaytor avers that the phrase 'corrupt Latyn' was in fact the *lingua franca* of merchants in the middle ages in *From Script to Print: An Introduction Medieval Vernacular Literature* (Cambridge: Heffer, 1945), p.28. A.C. Spearing suggests that Chaucer was aware of the 'sense of historical change' as Latin evolved into Italian in 'Narrative Voice: The Case of Chaucer's Man of Law's Tale', *New Literary History* 32 (2001), 715-46 (p.740). Christine F. Cooper-Rompato writes that 'Custance's Latinity, however is not a clerical or Scriptural variety but rather a vulgar or common one learnt "at the knee", a corrupt form of classical Latin that is fast approaching vernacular Italian' in *The Gift of Tongues: Women's Xenoglossia in the Later Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010), pp.165-166.

⁵⁴⁷ Quoted in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales Volume II*, eds Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005), pp.283-284.

physics, morals, astronomy, geometry, music, and optics, called the secular sciences, and had her instructed in various languages]⁵⁴⁸

The rhyming pair of ‘fame/name’, in Gower’s version, becomes central as we are told that this ‘maide’s’ reputation is world-renowned and her name spoken of extensively by all peoples that inhabit the globe. Furthermore ‘name’ is a synonym for ‘fame’ in medieval England as is ‘worschipe’ and Gower plays on these associations to magnify the emphasis being placed on reputation.⁵⁴⁹ As Patrick J. Gallacher writes ‘Although the superiority of Chaucer’s version of the story is a critical commonplace, the fact and significance of Gower’s greater insistence on the reputation of Constance has not been pointed out’.⁵⁵⁰ *Fama*, in the Middle Ages, was defined as public talk or speech and ‘conceived as a general impression that is inseparable from its embodiment in talk’ and this is clearly Gower’s understanding when he writes of those that ‘*spak* worschipe of hire goode name’⁵⁵¹ (CA, II, 596).⁵⁵² Further to this ‘it meant public opinion, idle talk, rumour, and reputation as well as fame, both a good name and a bad one were called *fama*; and while *fama* denoted information or news, at the same time it meant the image formed of a person by that information’.⁵⁵³ Thus *fama* became a kind of verbal portrait of a person and their honour that could be publically and continually passed around and exchanged and therefore becomes an ever shifting entity. Indeed with *fama* comes honour and the ‘*fama* that most closely parallels the kind of honour that could be bestowed only by other people [was] one that had to be plainly visible. It could be made so through material signs (clothing and other possessions) and through the performance of acts agreed on as honourable this honour therefore required witnesses, who carried reports of *fama* to others. As a visible cluster of acts, appearances and possessions, then, this predominant kind of medieval honour constituted and was constituted by both a material and a

⁵⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁴⁹ ‘French equivalents for *fama* may include *los*, *renoun*, *renommé*, *nom*, and *bon nom* (some of which were borrowed into Middle English), as well as the condemnatory *lozengiers* or (*lauzengiers*) those who did harm by revealing secret love affairs; and in English, *name*, *worship* and so on’, in *Fama: The Politics of Talk and Reputation in Medieval Europe*, eds Thelma Fenster and Daniel Lord Smail (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2003), p.10.

⁵⁵⁰ Patrick J. Gallacher, *Love, The Word, and Mercury: A Reading of John Gower’s Confessio Amantis* (Albuquerque, NM: University of New Mexico Press, 1975), p.93.

⁵⁵¹ Emphasis my own.

⁵⁵² Fenster and Smail, *Fama*, p.3.

⁵⁵³ Ibid, p.2.

discursive semiotics.’⁵⁵⁴ Thus *fama* is a type of *signum*, as is a name according to Augustine. We find therefore, with Gower’s rhyming pair of ‘fama/name’ a double emphasis on the *signum*. Moreover *Fama* as *signum* is reliant on semiotic interpretation and this interpretation is subject to corruption and manipulation as are all *signa* but in particular verbal and textual signs which, I will argue, the tale unequivocally reveals.

After being privy to her global notoriety, Genius finally names his protagonist ‘Constance, as the cronique seith, / Sche hihte’ (CA, II, 596-597). The medieval word ‘constance’ is derived from the Latin *constantia* meaning steadfastness, immutability, stability, and consistency.⁵⁵⁵ Thus ‘Constance’ ought to be associated with these attributes yet we find that Genius must explain her character, that she ‘was so ful of feith’ (CA, II, 598). Here, we see the first inkling of a separation between *res* and *signum*. Indeed, if the name, which is a *signum*, ‘Constance’ was truly representative of the thing (*res*) itself, that is the woman, then it would have no need to clarify itself as it would be self-evident to all. But, Genius deems it necessary to elucidate further on ‘Constance’s’ nature through an auxiliary and anecdotal story. Genius tells us:

That the greteste of Barbarie,
Of hem whiche usen marchandie,
Sche hath converted, as thei come
To hire upon a time in Rome,
To schewen such thing as thei broghte;
Whiche worthily of hem sche boghte (CA, II, 599-604)

Genius describes a story of how Constance managed to convert heathen merchants who came to the court at Rome to sell their wares. In exchange for their products Constance ‘hath hem with hire wordes wise / Of Cristes feith so full enformed, / That thei therto ben

⁵⁵⁴ Ibid, p.4.

⁵⁵⁵ Lewis and Short: *A Latin Dictionary, Founded on Andrews’ edition of Freund’s Latin dictionary revised, enlarged, and in great part rewritten by Charlton T. Lewis, Ph.D. and Charles Short, LL.D* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1879), ‘constantia’.

all conformed, / So that baptesme thei receiven' (CA, II, 606–609). As Marcela B. Gamallo points out 'while she [Constance] buys their goods, she talks in such a persuasive way that they are actually "buying" her discourse. How to perform business transactions is all these merchants know, and Constance apparently uses their market strategies to achieve her goal and convert them to her Christian faith'.⁵⁵⁶ Indeed, she trades information for the goods that she needs, her words becoming a sort of currency. But it is not her words (we are unaware of what language Constance speaks to them in) that baptize the merchants, they simply act as a persuasive force, strong enough for them to go and seek the sacrament. In essence, her words guide, as the Middle English word 'enfourmen' denotes⁵⁵⁷, the foreign traders to convert themselves.⁵⁵⁸ Gower very much highlights the agency of the merchants in this decision repeating the third person pronoun 'thei' throughout to show who is in control of the action. It is 'thei' (CA, II, 608) that conformed so that 'thei' (CA, II, 609) could receive baptism and when '*thei* have *here* ferste feith forsake / And *thei*, which hadden undertake / The rihte feith to kepe and holde' (CA, II, 615-617)⁵⁵⁹ the merchants appear to gain the insight into 'Cristes' truth and 'alle *here* false goddess weyven / Whan *thei* ben of the feith certain / *Thei* gon to Barbarie agein' (CA, II, 610-612).⁵⁶⁰ It is only after baptism that they can finally understand the false signs of their false gods, not through the external words of Constance, which only acted as advice, but through their own grace bestowed through the sacrament of baptism, which in the post-Incarnational world allows access to the interior teacher of Christ.

⁵⁵⁶ Marcela B. Gamallo, 'The Heathen Merchants', in *John Gower's Transformation of the Tale of Constance from Nicholas Trevet's Of the Noble Lady Constance*, ed. Peter G. Beidler, <<http://www.wcu.edu/johngower/scholarship/beidler/heathen.html>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

⁵⁵⁷ *MED* 'enfourmen' v. (2).

⁵⁵⁸ I would be remiss if I did not mention James Simpson's *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry* wherein Simpson argues for the importance of the key words 'enform' and 'enformacioun' to the *Confessio Amantis* and in particular to the relationship between Genius and Amans where the words are frequently used. Simpson remarks 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.' *Sciences and the Self in Medieval Poetry: Alan of Lille's Anticlaudianus and John Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p.5. Simpson points out that 'enform' occurs most often at the end of lines in the *Confessio* (p. 6) and therefore Kim Zarins finds a greater value in studying the rhyming pattern of 'enform' and 'enformed'. She finds that all 24 of the couplets were *rime riche* variants. 'Enformed' rhymed with 'conformed' and 'formed' which underscore the sense of 'form' informing the words, she writes, whether an intellectual shaping or spiritual moulding of the soul, 'Writing the Literary Zodiac: Division, Unity, and Power in John Gower's Poetics' (Unpublished PhD Dissertation, Cornell University, 2009), p.59.

⁵⁵⁹ Emphasis my own.

⁵⁶⁰ Emphasis my own.

When the newly converted merchants return to ‘Barbarie’, their sultan enquires of them as to why they have become Christians. They report to the sultan the existence of Constance and in turn her reputation:

And whan the Souldan of Constance
Upon the point that thei answerde
The beauté and the grace herde,
As he which thanne was to wedde,
In alle haste his cause spedde
To sende for the marriage. (CA, II, 620-625)

The sultan, on hearing Constance’s renown via the merchants immediately decides that he wants to marry her. He is utterly reliant on the words of the merchants to form a visual portrait of this woman whom he has never met and they tell him only of her beauty and her grace, attributes that are not represented in any way by her name nor of her being ‘so ful of feith’ a phrase that defined her character in her initial introduction. Indeed this is the first time the reader has become aware of her ‘beauté’ and ‘grace’ and as her *fama* crosses the sea to other lands it appears that her reputation mutates. This is the first instance of her *fama* being interpreted, and indeed translated into other languages, in the North African region of ‘Barbarie’. Nonetheless this second-hand, translated, description that has travelled the ocean becomes enough for the sultan to fast-track the marriage arrangements. Indeed, the sultan’s interpretation of Constance’s *fama* (‘beauté’, ‘grace’) leads him to believe that she would make him a good wife. Genius continues:

And furthermore with good corage
He seith, be so he mai hire have,
That Crist, which cam this world to save,
He woll believe: and this recorded,

Their ben on either side accorded (CA, II, 626-630)

The sultan says that, in order to marry Constance, he will convert to Christianity and this promise is recorded and relayed to her father who then acquiesces to the proposition despite the sultan's motivation being more to do with gaining a wife, albeit with 'good corage', than committedly believing in Christ. However, both sides are aware that words by themselves are unreliable. Genius inserts a degree of mistrust between the sultan and Constantine here and one that foreshadows later events. As surety the sultan sends to Rome, as hostages, twelve sons of Saracen Princes and in return Constantine sends two cardinals and many other noblemen along with his daughter to witness the sultan's conversion in person and report back. However, the verbal oath, the 'troth', and the physical guarantee ultimately come to naught as all parties, Christian and Saracen, are viciously betrayed, verbally and physically, as 'that which nevere was wel herted' (CA, II, 640), nicely contrasting with the sultan's 'good corage' earlier, has begun to work 'In destourbance of this spousaile' (CA, II, 642).

The sultan's mother, who is still alive, has a very different idea of the marriage proposal than her son and Constance's father. She evidently interprets Constance's *fama* in an entirely disparate and negative way, which all reputations are vulnerable to. She consequently thinks privately to herself "“If it so is / Mi sone him wedde in this manere, / Than have I lost my joies here, / For myn astat schal so be lassed”" (CA, II, 645-649). She is decidedly against such a union and is convinced that if the marriage between the sultan and Constance goes ahead she will lose her only son along with her religion and joy and would overall be debased, her status categorically lessened. Genius tells us that 'thus sche hath compassed / Be sleihte how that sche may beguile / Hire sone' (CA, II, 650 -652). Inflamed by the darts of Envy on hearing the *fama* of Constance's great beauty and grace spoken of throughout her court, she contrives to deceive her son through untruths - in particular verbal falsehoods. Both 'sleihte'⁵⁶¹ and 'beguile' are words frequently used by Gower to denote verbal deceit or semiotic trickery. When she finds herself alone with him, Genius stresses that 'Sche feigneth wordes in his ere' (CA, II, 654) and in direct opposition to Constance's 'wise wordes' he remarks of her false speech 'And in this wise gan to seie' (CA, II, 655). The sultanness lies to her son, interestingly

⁵⁶¹ See 1.688, 1.1111, 1.2591; 2.2178, 2.2378.

opening her false monologue with the very terminology that Genius uses throughout the *Confessio* 'Mi sone' (CA, II, 656) a phrase she repeats elsewhere in the speech (CA, II, 665). It is unmistakably used as a rhetorical device that stresses her special relationship as mother in which to lure the sultan into a false sense of security drawing him ever closer to her. She declares:

Mi sone, I am be double weie
With al myn herte glad and blithe,
“For that myself have ofte sithe
Desired thou wolt, as men seith,
Receive and take a newe feith,
Which schal be forthringe of thi lif:
And ek so worschipful a wif,
The doughter of an emperor,
To wedde it schal be gret honour.
Forthi, mi sone, I you beseche
That I such grace mihte areche,
Whan that my doughter come schal,
That I mai thanne in special,
So as me thenkth it is honeste,
Be thilke which the ferste feste
Schal make unto hire welcominge” (CA, II, 656-671)

Gower crafts this speech brilliantly, each word dripping with irony to show how verbal signs can be so utterly manipulated and exploited to the speaker's advantage. She pretends to be doubly glad and blithe but her words hide the implication that she is

deceitful. She fakes that she has long desired for the Sultan to take on a new religion, contrary to her earlier thoughts that the reader has been privy to, averring that it ‘schal be forthringe of thi lif’ (CA, II, 661), that it will improve and advance his life when, in truth, it ironically will cut short his very life. This may even be a clever play by the Sultan’s mother on the Middle English verb ‘Forthringen’ which means ‘to oppress (someone)’ and certainly the ambiguity of meaning that exists with this word allows for this.⁵⁶²

The sultanness continues to simulate joy at the thought of his marriage to Constance, who knows her by reputation as ‘the doghter of an emperour’ (CA, II, 663). She obsequiously calls Constance so ‘worschiful a wif’, perhaps imitating the language of Christianity and making a sideswipe at her sacrosanct status (heightened in Trivet’s version) as well as her noble position as offspring of the Roman Emperor. She claims it would be a ‘gret honour’ for him to wed Constance which is demonstrably false as we know she firmly believes her estate, family, belief, and happiness will all be diminished by such a union. Indeed, it may be Constance’s high status that underlie the sultanness’ fears. Again with rich irony she asks the sultan to allow her to throw Constance, now called with fictitious affection ‘my doughter’ (CA, II, 667), the first feast to welcome her so that she might possess ‘such grace’ (CA, II, 666), perhaps that same grace as Constance is known for and certainly this is designed to pit the sultanness in great opposition to Constance here. Of course, the sultan’s mother is making every serious effort to ensure that Constance never becomes her ‘doughter’. Indeed, the *pièce de résistance* which concludes the sultanness’ ironic and incongruous speech is that she persuades her son that she is doing all of the above as she ‘thenketh it is honeste’ (CA, II, 669) which it is anything but.

She has utilised double entendres exploiting the cracks between interpretation and meaning, engaged in paronomasia, employed outright lies, and dabbled in rhetorical flourishes and ‘colores’, in essence all the tools of the arts of language which are subjected to the post-lapsarian unstable *signum*, to persuade her son that she ought to host the first feast for the overseas visitors and the sultan’s bride-to-be. The sultan, with no reason to believe otherwise, is persuaded by his mother and agrees to her bidding. But as the reader has become astutely aware, the sultanness’ thoughts, words, and deeds are entirely foreign to each other. There are echoes of Adam and Eve here, particularly in

⁵⁶² MED ‘forthringen’ v.

relation to woman's use of rhetoric and subsequent abuse of language that ultimately leads to death.⁵⁶³ Genius tells us: 'For under that anon sche drowh / With false wordes that sche spak / Covine of deth behind his bak' (CA, II 674 -676). Concealed beneath her outward words to her son where she declares her 'double' joy at his upcoming marriage, lies a conspiracy to murder: 'Therefore / Sche made so, that whan Constance / Was come forth with the Romeins, / Of clerkes and of citizeins, / A riche feste sche hem made' (CA, II, 678-681). But this was just a semblance of a feast with all the signs and symbols of a wedding festival, just as her joyful words were only a substitute for reality. The reality, in grand contrast, couldn't be more detached from 'glad and blithe' (CA, II, 657) if it tried:

With fals covine which sche hadde
Hire clos Envie tho sche spradde,
And alle tho that hadden be
Or in apert or in privé
Of conseil to the marriage,
Sche slowh hem in a sodein rage
Endlong the bord as thei be set,
So that it myht nocht be let (CA, II, 683-690)

Instead of a celebration, the sultan's mother organizes a massacre, joy displaced by death. And 'Hire oghne sone was nocht quit / Bot deide upon the same plit' (CA, II, 691-692), the man she affectionately called 'mi sone' was slaughtered just like the rest. Genius remarks in Book IV 'That word mai worche above kinde' (CA, IV, 438) and in this visceral example the 'word' has detached itself from nature and worked in a most 'unkinde' way as a mother intentionally murders her own child. She has eradicated the more reliable natural *signum* (her son) and promoted the unreliable verbal sign or *data*

⁵⁶³ This biblical association is heightened in Trivet's account when he describes the sultanness as 'le membre au diable' [that member of the devil] (NLC, 102-03). Gower follows suit with a more subtle but arguably still a biblical allusion by calling her 'this olde fend' (CA, II, 705).

signum. The sultanness' unnatural and false words gives rise to an unnatural and brutal scene which, in Genius' version, is expanded with all the gory details unlike Gower's source Trivet. He tells us:

To se the feste how that it stod,
Which al was torned into blod
The dissh forth with the coppe and al
Bebled thei were overal.
Sche sih hem deie on every side;
No wonder thogh sche wepte and cride
Makende many a wofull mone.
Whan al was slain bot sche alone (CA, II, 697-704)

The feast was transformed into blood, literally. The plates, instead of serving delicacies befitting a wedding feast, provided only a sanguineous repast. The cups, instead of expensive wine, were filled to the brim with the blood of the guests. These signs of marriage and feast which ought to be unimpeachable have, nonetheless, been supplanted by those completely conflicting signs of unequivocal death. Furthermore, Matthew Irvin remarks that 'Her murderous "rage" (II. 688) at the marriage feast not only results from her "Envie", the supposed topic of the tale, but also produces a desecration of the sacraments of marriage and baptism (which were ostensibly in process or recently concluded) and, through Gower's language, of the Eucharist. The "wedding feast" was "al torned into blod" in a travesty of the consecration; Gower makes sure to note that "The dish forth with the coppe" were covered with gore, and his use of the singular makes the association with the paten and chalice'.⁵⁶⁴ This heathen Saracen, beginning with an act of verbal deceit, has concluded the episode by enacting a perverse parody of Christian holy signs, sacraments. 'Bot what the hihe God wol spare / It mai for no peril misfare' (CA, II, 693-694) and this 'worthi maiden' (CA, II, 695) Constance was saved from all

⁵⁶⁴ Matthew Irvin, *The Poetic Voices of John Gower*, p.127.

the carnage that surrounded her. But ‘This olde fend, this Sarazine’ (CA, II, 705), the sultanness, devised another plan and set Constance alone adrift on:

A naked schip withoute stiere,
In which the good and hire in fiere,
Vitailed full for yeres fyve;
Wher that the wynd it wolde dryve,
Sche putte upon the wawes wilde (CA, II, 709-713)

Symbolically and subsequently ironically, this ‘Sarazine’ manipulator of *signa* has abandoned ‘immutability’ and ‘stability’, which ‘Constance’s’ name represents and is a signification that the sultanness does not recognize, to the vast ocean to float purposelessly, alone and without a guide in a ‘rudderless ship’.

Genius tells us ‘Bot He which alle thing mai schilde, / Thre yer, til that sche cam to londe, / Hire schip to stiere hath take in honde’ (CA, II, 714-716). Constance, under the auspices of the Divine hand, is after three years guided towards the land of ‘Northumberlond’. Here when her boat ‘in Northumberlond aryveth’ (CA, II, 717), it drifts along the river Humber and under a castle owned by a king ‘The which Allee was cleped tho’ (CA, II, 722). Northumberland was evidently pagan at this time and this King Allee, Genius remarks, was ‘A Saxon and a worthi knyht, / Bot he believeth nocht ariht’ (CA, II, 723-724). The King’s chamberlain Elda spotted Constance’s ship drifting unaccompanied into the castle and ‘He bad anon men sholden go / To se what it betokne mai’ (CA, II, 730-731). Elda wonders what this unusual event signifies (betokne). The men search the ship and find Constance almost immediately. Elda and his wife approach her and:

Toward this Yonge ladi gon,
Wher that thei founden gret richesse.
Bot sche hire wolde nocht confesse,

Constance is surrounded by ‘the good’ (CA, II, 710) that the sultanness left together with her on the ship. In Trivet’s version this is the provisions to sustain her for the duration of her journey alongside the treasure of her dowry and presumably this is included in Gower’s ‘good’ as well. Elda and his wife observe the external signs of wealth and riches but they do not recognise and do not understand the significance of Constance’s name and thus the relationship between *res* and *signum*. It is not instantly obvious to them and they must ‘axen what sche was’ (CA, II, 739), a theme that will be repeated later in the story, but Constance will not reveal anything about herself and so their sought explanation must wait. In complete contrast, in Trivet’s story the multilingual Constance converses with the pair in fluent Saxon (Et [ele] lui respoundi en Sessoneis [And she answered him in Saxon] NLC 129) only leaving out certain intimate details of her life (NLC, 129-34). And it is at this juncture in the story that Chaucer announces that ‘A maner Latyn corrupt was hir speche, / But algates therby was she understonde’ (MLT, 519-520); though Constance spoke her own language she was always correctly comprehended. Elda and his wife, nevertheless, take Constance into their ‘felaschipe’ (CA, II, 742) as ‘thei weren of hir glade’ (CA, II, 743). But Constance ‘no maner joie made, / Bot sorweth sore of that sche fond / No Cristendom in thilke lond’ (CA, II, 744-746). Saddened that she had landed in a pagan realm ‘thus with hem sche duelleth stille’ (CA, II, 748). Gower purposely plays on the layered meanings of the Middle English adverb ‘stille’ here to infer that Constance stays with Elda and his wife but also remains silent, speechless, and concealed which relates to her unwillingness to speak in the previous lines.⁵⁶⁵

Genius continues the story by naming Elda’s wife as ‘Dame Hermyngheld’ (CA, II, 749) who ‘lich her ogne lif / Constance loveth’ (CA, II, 750-751). As Kurt E. Douglass has noted ‘although they are not Christians at this point in Gower’s story, the couple already demonstrates the principal Christian virtues of charity and love of one’s neighbour. Gower seems to want to suggest that this trust demonstrates that Elda and his wife are already halfway to becoming true Christians, that they already, in a way, have

⁵⁶⁵ *MED* ‘stille’ adv. ‘to dwell continuously, to remain, be left’ (5); ‘silently, noiselessly, without a sound, without speaking’ (1); ‘secretly, covertly, privately’ (4).

the seeds of Christianity - love and charity - within them when Constance arrives on their shores'.⁵⁶⁶ Indeed, Genius tells us that:

[...] and fell so,
Spekende alday between hem two,
Thurgh grace of Goddes pourveance
This maiden tawhte the creance
Unto this wif so parfitly (CA, II, 751-755)

Importantly, Gower has not specified what language Constance is speaking in here giving us instead a generic description of communication with the use of one verb 'spekende'. He has thus far left out any mention of her formal education in the seven liberal arts, which Trivet includes, and omits any reference to her multilingual skill, which played a prominent role both in Trivet and Chaucer's redactions. On the contrary, Constance's speech has been thoroughly modulated throughout Gower's adaptation and the lack of language particulars in this scene further corroborates this. Trivet elaborates in his account on the precise substance of Constance's teachings, including Old Testament biblical history as well as the birth and Passion of Christ, the sacraments of the church, and heaven and hell. Gower tells us that it is not through words that Hermyngheld learns about Constance's beliefs but he specifically reveals that it is only through the 'grace' of God. And 'grace', according to Aquinas and Augustine, is present internally, inscribed on the heart after 'Cristes Lawe'. As Douglass writes 'Constance merely nurtures the seeds of faith that are already in Hermyngheld'⁵⁶⁷ who looks inwardly to consult the interior teacher of Christ. Sometime later both Hermyngheld and Constance go walking on the beach where 'A blind man, which cam there lad' (CA, II, 759) who has heard of Hermyngheld's new found faith, asks her to 'gif me my sihte' (CA, II, 765). This man is described as 'un povre Cristien Bruton enveuglés' [a poor blind Christian Briton] (NLC,

⁵⁶⁶ Kurt E. Douglass, 'The Voyage to Northumberland' in *John Gower's Transformation of the Tale of Constance from Nicholas Trevet's Of the Noble Lady Constance*, ed. Peter Beidler (April, 2006) <<http://www.wcu.edu/johngower/scholarship/beidler/voyage-northumberland.html>> n.p. [accessed September 29th 2017].

⁵⁶⁷ Kurt E. Douglass, 'The Voyage to Northumberland'.

176) in Trivet's version separating him in nationality and language from his Saxon overlords. Trivet actually deviates from his Anglo-Norman to write this part in Middle English to reinforce the language change and Hermyngheld's own multilingualism. After a brief history of the indigenous 'Britons so exiled' to Wales by the pagan Saxon conquerors (MLT 540-553), Chaucer also chooses to include the nationality of the man calling him a 'blinde Britoun' and though he doesn't emphasise his language it must thus be assumed to be Brittonic. Gower, on the other hand, makes no mention of the man's difference in nationality or his particular language and in fact appears to actively omit them. Instead, simply a blind man approaches Hermyngheld appealing a miraculous cure for his vision loss. Hermyngheld 'Upon his word hire herte afflihte' (CA, II, 766) but nevertheless, needing no extra verbal reassurance from Constance as occurs with Trivet and Chaucer, she proceeds confidently declaring 'In trust of Cristes lawe, / Which don was on the crois and slawe, / Thou bysne man, behold and se' (CA, II, 769-771). The old man 'With that to God upon his kne / Thonkende he tok his sihte anon / Wherof thei merveile everychon' (CA, II, 771-773). Elda, who had accompanied the pair on their 'walkende on the stronde' (CA, II, 758), also witnessed this miracle and 'Concludeth him be such a weie, / That he the feith mot need obeie' (CA, II, 777-778). Thus, Elda needed to 'see' himself before committing to his own conversion and in Trivet's tale Hermyngheld had, despite her wishes, been unable to convert to Christianity as her husband had remained pagan.

It is this witnessed miracle that sends Elda to King Allee and, knowing he is unwed, 'Of Constance al the pleine cas / Als goodliche as he cowthe tolde' (CA, II, 785-786). He relays Constance's *fama* to the king as interpreted and observed by himself but making sure her *fama* is as good and as favourable to the king as possible. Allee was 'glad' (CA, II, 788) and liked what he heard and so devised a plan to see Constance in person and so 'that he him miht of hire advise' (CA, II, 790). Constance, at this point, is in the company of Hermyngheld 'at hom abod' (CA, II 782) and Elda contacts a knight that he 'triste in special' (CA, II, 792) and 'whom fro childhode / He hadde updrawe into manhode / To him he tolde al that he thoghte' (CA, II, 793-795). Confiding in this surrogate son, this mistaken natural sign, Elda 'unto his wif he bad him ride' (CA, II, 798) to warn her 'Again the cominge of the king' (CA, II, 800). However, misreading the usually infallible natural sign, Elda 'after him forthoghte', afterwards forever regretted ever speaking to him. This special surrogate father and son relationship between Elda and

the young knight is unique to Gower's retelling. In Trivet's account, this knight has no relationship to Elda⁵⁶⁸ at all but is merely part of the king's retinue who had already been baptized and Chaucer follows Trivet describing him simply as 'a yonge knight that dwelte in that toun' (MLT, 585). Gower's knight has not been baptized, like Trivet's, but is a pagan and his creation of a special familial bond, though not sanguine and therefore not legitimate, between the two men magnifies the heart-breaking betrayal and transgression of 'troth' that ensues. Elda, by playing the role of father, has mistakenly interpreted this young man as a natural sign of himself, falsely believing that he would automatically be honourable towards him as parent.

But, Gower has designated him as a 'false knyght' (CA, II, 824) directly in contrast to Elda's description as 'A knyghtly man after his lawe' (CA, II, 727) which plays on the deceitful sense of 'false' as well as debasing him socially and further distancing him from his surrogate noble lineage. This knight agrees to ride forth to where Constance and Hermyngheld are but on the way, having heard so much of Constance's excellent *fama* from Elda 'He hadde in al his wit compassed / How he Constance myhte winne' (CA, II, 806-807). The knight has interpreted Constance's 'als goodliche' (CA, II, 787) *fama* in a sexual manner and having no knowledge of the woman herself, only encountering her through a verbal portrait he is nevertheless completely inflamed with desire. However, he finds that he is entirely incapable of devising a suitable plan to conquer her sexually and 'Wherof his lust began t'abate, / And that was love is thanne hate' (CA, II, 809-810). Love is so easily exchanged for hate here and he becomes especially jealous of her good *fama* and 'Of hire honour he hadde Envie' (CA, II, 811). Again, the knight has never met Constance in person but interprets her *fama*, so indistinguishable from the verbal sign, in two entirely different ways showing its ultimate interpretative fragility and semantic instability. And so instead of a plan on how he might win Constance 'So that upon his tricherie / A lesinge in his herte he caste' (CA, II, 812-813); he turns to lies and treachery.

He subsequently arrives at Hermyngheld's abode, as Genius continues to tell us, and relays the message from her husband and she and Constance then go about 'setten thinges in arrai' (CA, II, 818). But when it came to night, Hermyngheld went to bed with Constance beside her. The knight:

⁵⁶⁸ He is named Olda in Trivet's version.

And to the bed he stalketh stille,
Wher that he wiste was the wif,
And in his hond a rasour knif
He bar, with which hire throte he cutte,
And prively the knif he putte
Under that other beddes side,
Wher that Constance lai beside (CA, II, 828-834)

The false knight sneaks in to the women's bedroom and slits Hermyngheld's throat and conceals the murder weapon by Constance's side of the bed in a bid to implicate her. Elda returns home and 'fond his dede wif bledende' (CA, II, 840), blood becoming a *signum* for death, with Constance lying asleep beside her. He cries out in horror and 'up sterte every man aboute' (CA, II, 850) including the sleeping Constance 'Wherof swounende ded for fere' (CA, II, 846), perhaps a true natural *signum* of her innocence, when she observes the bloody murder scene. The castle is awake and looking for a meaning to this gruesomeness and, as Genius continues to relate:

Bot he, which alle untrouthe mente
This false knyht, among hem alle
Upon this thing which is befall
Seith that Constance hath don this dede;
And to the bed with that he yede
After the falshed of his speche,
And mad him there for to seche,
And fond the knif, wher he it leide (CA, II, 852-859)

This 'false knyht' who is intentionally 'alle untrouthe mente' announces through verbal *signa* that Constance is the perpetrator of this heinous deed. In this instance the words that the knight 'seith' do not match the 'dede' that he claims Constance undertook. Of course, the audience is fully aware of who did the deed and it is not who he claims it is. Having firstly manipulated the verbal sign, the knight further perverts the perceived *signum* of the murder, the knife. He leads the men present towards the bloody knife which had been lying beside Constance and their natural conclusion to draw based on the *signa* available is that Constance murdered Hermyngheld. The knight adds to the manipulated false evidence through speech 'And thanne he cride and thanne he seide' (CA, II, 860), Genius tell us, and publically declares 'Lo, seth the knif al blody hier! / What nedeth more in this matiere / To axe?' (CA, II, 861-63). All *signa* point to Constance according to the 'false knyht' showing how easy it is to manipulate both verbal and visual *signa*. The knight has successfully slandered Constance and diminished her good *fama*, which was his initial intent, 'with false wordes whiche he feigneth' (CA, II, 865).

But Elda is not swayed by the knight's invented evidence and so the knight spots a book by the bedside and taking it Genius tells us that:

This knyht hath swore and seid on hih
That alle men it mihte wite,
'Now be this bok, which hier is write,
Constance is gultif, wel I wot' (CA, II, 870-873)

The knight compounds the instability of the *signum* by falsely swearing a verbal oath on what appears to be a generic book full of textual *signa* to profess his counterfeited 'truth' which is that Constance is guilty. Thus, he implicates the textual sign as well as verbal and visual *signa* in his fraud. In Trivet's account the book that the knight swore on when he accused Constance of murder was 'q'estoit livre des Evangeils, quel les seint femmes Hermegild et Constance' [a book of the gospels that the holy women Hermegild and Constance] (NLC, 242-43) had with them every night. Chaucer makes it a 'Britoun book'

that was ‘written with Evaungiles’ (MLT, 666). But Gower consciously omits this religious detail which allows, then, the purposely anonymous book to represent all textual *signa* which in turn enables him to make an essential point about the inability of the written word to stand for truth. Post-lapsarian textual signs along with verbal and visual signs are unstable and thus exposed to corruption, interpretative errors, and manipulation. This foreshadows the deceit that will plague Constance later in her story.

This egregious string of semiotic transgressions causes a divine reaction when ‘With that hond of hevne him smot / In tokne of that he was forswore’ (CA, II, 874-876).⁵⁶⁹ Because of the knight’s perjury and false pledge ‘he hath both hise yhen lore, / Out of his hed the same stounde / Thei sterte, and so thei weren founde’ (CA, II, 876-878).⁵⁷⁰ Suddenly a divine voice is heard which said “‘O dampned man to helle, / Lo, thus hath God the sclaudre wroke / That thou agein Constance hast spoke: / Beknowe the sothe er that thou dye” / And he told out his felonie’ (CA, II, 880-884). The offender is divinely compelled to confess to all of his treacherous acts. In Trivet’s original account the knight loses his eyes *and* his teeth thus making him unable to offer any confession. Gower, however, excludes this loss of teeth which allows the knight to publically admit to his crimes in order to publically restore Constance’s *fama* both involving verbal acts. Patrick J. Gallacher remarks ‘significantly, it is not a question here of Constance defending herself, but of a divine voice, the apotheosis of her reputation, taking up her cause and forcing the guilty to confess - an effect which calls attention to the framework dialogue between Genius and Amans. The divine voice, by virtue of its miraculous authenticity, removes the distance between reputation and identity in Constance and makes them one, for the moment at least’.⁵⁷¹ Indeed, for this brief instant in the story *res* and *signum* have reconciled but only through infallible divine agency. The moment is fleeting however.

⁵⁶⁹ In Trivet’s version a literal hand of God comes down from heaven and strikes the knight where in Gower’s account here it appears to be much more metaphorical. Chaucer removes all mention of divine intervention remarking simply that ‘An hand hym smoot’ (MLT, 669) and again instead of a voice from heaven Chaucer describes ‘A voys was herd in general audience’ (MLT, 673).

⁵⁷⁰ In the Latin marginalia it is not God but an angel of the Lord that metes out the punishment: ‘Set Angelus domini ipsum sic detrahentem in maxilla subito percuciens non solum pro mendace comprobavit, set ictu mortali post ipsius confessionem penitus interfect’ [But an angel of the Lord, striking him suddenly in the jaw while he was detracting her, not only convicted him for his lie but also, with a mortal blow after his confession, utterly killed him].

⁵⁷¹ Patrick J. Gallacher, *Love, The Word, and Mercury*, p.97.

King Allee, who was already scheduled to make an appearance at Elda's home before the tragedy occurred, finally arrives. However, as soon as he gets there 'it was to him recorded / What God hath wrought upon this chaunce' (CA, II, 892-893). The king was not present to witness any of the miraculous events but hears of the happenings through word of mouth. Certainly 'He must depend once more on hearsay knowledge, which, in keeping with the pattern exemplified by the sultan, converts him to Christianity and love of Constance'.⁵⁷²

For al his hole herte he leide
Upon Constance, and seide, he scholde
For love of hire, if that sche wolde,
Baptisme take and Cristes feith
Believe, and over that he seith
He wol hire wedde, and upon this
Asseured ech til other is (CA, II, 896-902)

Purely based on Constance's restored *fama*, the king orders Bishop Lucie from Bangor in Wales to preside over the baptism and 'which thurgh the grace of God almihte / The king with many another mo / Hath cristned, and between hem tuo / He hath fulfilled the marriage' (CA, II, 906-909). But despite the union Constance is steadfast in remaining 'stille' and incognito as she 'Bot for no lust ne for no rage / Sche tolde hem nevere what sche was' (CA, II, 910-911). Her new husband is none the wiser as to her identity but 'was glad, how so it stod' (CA, II, 913) and convinces himself that 'Sche was a noble creature' (CA, II, 915).

Before long, Constance becomes pregnant 'with childe be the king' (CA, II, 919) but Allee must depart for war against the Scots and leaves his wife behind in the company of Elda and the Bishop. While the king is away, Constance gives birth to a healthy baby boy delivered 'sauf and sone' (CA, II, 935). The Bishop baptises him 'Moris' (CA, II,

⁵⁷² Ibid.

937) and ‘With lettres writen of record’ to send to the king via messenger. This ‘messenger, To Knaresburgh / Which toun he scholde passe thurgh, / Ridende cam the ferste day. / The kings moder there lay’ (CA, II, 943-946). The messenger goes to Knaresburgh a detail unique to Gower and A.C Edwards suggests that, because of its affiliations with the murder of Thomas à Becket, Knaresburgh still bore the aroma of treachery and treason in Gower’s day’.⁵⁷³ The messenger tells the news to the king’s mother Domilde but like the sultanness it turns out that she has interpreted Constance’s *fama* in a different manner and instead of being persuaded to love her she secretly harbours a great hatred for her:

And sche with feigned joie it herde
And gaf him giftes largely,
Bot in the nyht al prively
Sche tok the lettres which he hadde,
Fro point to point and overadde,
As sche that was thurghout untrewe,
And let do wryten othre newe
In stede of hem, and thus thei spieke (CA, II, 952-959)

Domilde publically declares her joy but once again word and deed do not match and privately she counterfeits the textual sign, altering the very letters, no doubt written in their vernacular, contained within the message. In place of the original message she writes that ‘Thi wif, which is of faierie, / Of such a child delivered is / Fro kinde which stant al amis’ (CA, II, 964-966). In the new letter Domilde, exploiting Constance’s mysterious *fama*, accuses her of being an otherworldly and supernatural creature who has given birth to an unnatural child, in essence a changeling. By perverting the written *signa* she not only falsifies Constance’s *fama* in written form but perverts the king’s son - his natural

⁵⁷³ A.C. Edwards, ‘Knaresborough Castle and “The Kynges Moodres Court”, *Philological Quarterly* 19.3 (1940), 306-09, quoted in *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell Peck, p.340.

signum. This natural *signum* is further corrupted when she writes that he has been taken out of sight ‘For drede of pure worldes schame’ (CA, II, 969) and:

A povere child and in the name
Of thilke which is so misbore
We toke, and therto we be swore,
That non bot only thou and we
Schal knowen of this priveté
Moris it hatte, and thus men wene
That it was boren of the qweene
And of thin oghne bodi gete. (CA, II, 970-977)

Domilde tells Allee that she has substituted this disfigured and unnatural child with a healthy baby of poor parents and called it Moris so that publically everyone believes him to be the king’s own natural child. She is, effectively, through counterfeit words counterfeiting the natural *signum* and Genius declares that ‘This lettre, as thou hast herd devise, / Was contrefet in such a wise / That no man scholde it aperceive’ (CA, II, 981-983); that Domilde forged this written document so well that no one could tell the difference between the true and false version. Counterfeit documents in the Middle Ages required a forged seal to truly convince the reader of their authenticity and it is likely Domilde did just that here, forging the ecclesiastical *signature* and seal/*signum* of Bishop Lucie, adding yet more *signa* to her semiotic connivance. Furthermore, the term ‘lettre’ (CA, II, 981) here, as used by Genius, has the dual meaning of not only a written document but also in a more generic sense an alphabetic character of a writing script. Thus, Genius subtly intimates through this semantic binary that all writing in essence is counterfeit which self-referentially calls attention to the *Confessio* and authorial reliability.

The messenger, unaware of the deceit underway, wakes up the next day and picks up the forged letter that Domilde left by his side and leaves Knaresburgh for King Allee.

King Allee receives the letter and ‘He makth the messenger no chiere’ (CA, II, 991) and writes a letter of his own back bidding the Bishop and Elda to keep his wife safe there and wait until ‘thei have herd more of his wille’(CA, II, 996). The messenger takes the letter in all haste back to Knaresburgh where Domilde awaited. He tells her what the king has ordered and she convinces him to stay overnight to allow more forgery to occur:

And made him feste and chiere ariht,
Feignende as thogh sche cowthe him thonk.
Bot he with strong wyn which he dronk
Forth with the travail of the day
Was drunke, aslepe, and while he lay,
Sche hath hise lettres overseie
And formed in another weie. (CA, II, 1006-1012)

Domilde displays how easy it is to falsify the textual sign, as well as impersonate the king’s words and his signature and seal. She pens a new letter and masquerading as the king she writes how he knows ‘Constance is faie’ (CA, II, 1019) and that without delay she should be put ‘out of compaignie’ (CA, II, 1021) and furthermore ‘Hire child schal noght among hem duelle / To cleyment eny heritage’ (CA, II, 1024-1025). And ‘thus this lettre contrefet’ (CA, II, 1040), Genius tells us, which all at once corrupts Constance’s *fama*, defrauds Moris of his rightful inheritance and lineage, and sends Constance back to the rudderless ship that she came in on.

Though the Bishop and Elda have ‘So gret a sorwe’ (CA, II, 1044) they nonetheless believe all ‘that writen is withinne’ (CA, II, 1045) and Constance and her infant son are placed in the ship at set adrift once again. Domilde has demonstrated just how easy it is to manipulate all mutable *signa*, how unstable the post-lapsarian verbal, textual, and visual *signa* really are. The ‘mutable, steadfast, unchanging’ Constance is now believed to be ‘faie’ and her child a deformed monster. The fact Domilde can influence Constance’s *fama* in such a manner illustrates the conventionality of

Constance's name and thus all names. Gower is, therefore, indicating that this relationship between *res* and *signum* is a conventional one, that is to say meaning simply based on localized common agreement as Raison's examples of the ladies who name 'testicles' all sorts of differing names, each as arbitrary as the last. Importantly Gower establishes, in amongst all the unreliable signs, where truth resides through a prayer that Constance recites and one that 'appeals unequivocally to the divine truth, the ultimate defence against detraction, and complements the previous intervention of the divine voice'⁵⁷⁴:

Sche seide, '*O hihe magesté,*

Which sest the point of every trowthe,

Tak of thi wofull woman rowthe

And of this childe that I schal kepe.' (CA, II, 1058-1061)⁵⁷⁵

Gower, throughout this tale has been showing that truth categorically does not lie in earthly signs but is solely the remit of the divine which in a post-Incarnation world can be accessed by Christians internally through the gift of prayer. Indeed, this act of prayer actually saves Constance's life when the would-be rapist Theloüs 'A fals knyht and a renegat' (CA, II, 1092-93) attempts to ravish her in her boat when after a year drifting she is guided by God under a castle wall of a heathen admiral in eastern Spain (CA, II, 1084-1125). As we shall in the next section, Gower too places special emphasis on prayer and its internal operations.

Following this harrowing experience, Constance's boat, after three years, drifted in amongst a 'gret navye' (CA, II, 1128). The 'maister' (CA, II, 1134) of the fleet, having witnessed her boat join alongside, sent his men over to seek an explanation for its presence. Constance attempted to hide herself, concerned about another possible rape attempt no doubt, but the men find her and Moris quickly. Again, unable to recognize her they ask 'fro whenne that sche cam, / And what sche was' (CA, II, 1147-1148). She

⁵⁷⁴ Gallacher, *Love, The Word, and Mercury*, p.98.

⁵⁷⁵ Emphasis my own.

answers simply that ‘I am / a woman woefully bestad’ (CA, II, 1148-1149) once again giving no more detail other than that she ‘lieve and triste in Cristes feith’ (CA, II, 1160). They ask her for her name and she responds ‘Min name is Couste’ (CA, II, 1163) and as we learn later this is a Saxon translation of ‘Constance’: ‘For Couste in Saxoun is to sein / Constance upon the word Romein’ (CA, II, 1405-1406). In Trivet’s version Constance names herself ‘Couste’ but informs the men then and there that it is a name of Saxon origin and Chaucer omits this storyline entirely. Genius remarks, however, that ‘Bot of hir name, which sche feigneth, / Alle othre thinges sche restreigneth, / That a word more sche ne tolde’ (CA, II, 1167-1169). Constance continues her practice of remaining ‘stille’ but Genius accuses her of *feigning* her name, that is to say using a deceitful verbal sign. This is the first time that Constance commits such an act of falseness but nonetheless shows that Constance, though imbued with grace and of a holier disposition than all the other characters, nevertheless cannot escape the ubiquitous earthly corrupted sign.

Certainly, her substitution of one name for another can be done, since Gower has shown throughout this tale that names are merely conventional, *ad placitum* and again in this part of the tale all agree to call her ‘Couste’. Moreover, Genius is singularly declaring through the use of the verb ‘feigneth’ that the act of translation which she is participating in, as we find out later, is ultimately a false act. Therefore, Gower emphasises, as I point out in Chapter Four that translation is not truthful but a false alteration and one that is not immune from the post-lapsarian decay of the sign as it is in fact subject to it. Here, the purpose of translation is to further obscure and conceal Constance’s identity, in essence her truth. ‘Couste’ has no meaning to those in the court of Rome, where Constance is finally taken by her wards Arcennus and Helen. It is only King Allee, through his own linguistic knowledge of Saxon, who understands what the name ‘Couste’ means when he eventually goes to the Roman court on pilgrimage, once again showing the conventional relationship between *res* and *signum*.

THE 'ORO MALUS' OF GOWER'S PROLOGUE

The *Confessio Amantis* is a poem, as David K. Coley writes, that is 'resolutely invested in the ability of the tongue'.⁵⁷⁶ The dominating theme of the poem is overwhelmingly that of language, both spoken and written. Words are the inescapable foundational elements of the entire piece and Gower pays them particular attention investigating their purpose and exploring their nature and limitations in the service of truth. The framing section and the initial Latin heading that launches the whole poem resolutely reflects this focus. The dense Latin verse reads, as Irvin remarks, as a 'riddling test of intellectual capability' addressed 'not to the noble but the clerical reader'⁵⁷⁷:

Torpor, ebes sensus, scola parua labor minimusque

Causant quo minimus ipse minora canam:

Qua tamen Engisti lingua canit Insula Bruti

Anglica Carmente metra iuuante loquar

Ossibus ergo carens que conerit ossa loquelis

Absit, et interpres stet procul oro malus. (CA, Prologue, i)

[Listlessness, dull discernment, little schooling and least labour are the causes by which, I, least of all, sing things all the lesser. Nonetheless, in the tongue of Hengist in which the island of Brutus sang, with Carmentis' aid I will utter English verses. Let then the boneless one that breaks bones with speeches be absent, and let the interpreter wicked in word stand far away.]

Gower opens the poem, self-reflexively, with an allusion to sloth, a physical and spiritual stupefaction leading to the numbing of his senses which should, in contrast, be sharp and

⁵⁷⁶ David K. Coley, *The Wheel of Language: Representing Speech in Middle English Poetry 1377-1422* (Syracuse, N.Y: Syracuse University Press, 2012), p.155.

⁵⁷⁷ Irvin, *Poetic Voices*, p.50.

on guard. Coupled with minimum education and labour, he states that these are the reasons he has cause to write the current content, his song in poetic form, which, admittedly, is of lesser quality due to the aforementioned problems. It is an inauspicious start to one of the fourteenth century's most important works of Middle English poetry. It evokes the image of an intellectually inactive writer, struggling to navigate through a world interpreted through the impaired senses and this, in turn, is reflected in the words the poet selects and the content he places on the page. Though distinctly influenced by the modesty trope so prevalent in Latin poetry there is, nonetheless, a palpable unease, not only in Gower's recognition of the flaws of his own writing ability, but about the potential flaws of the perceived *sentence* of his work and the interpretation of the meaning of his words. This is magnified and, indeed, complicated by the choice or 'forme of speche' as Chaucer writes in *Troilus and Criseyde*,⁵⁷⁸ to proceed with the rest of the poem in the English language which Gower refers to, here, as Hengist's tongue. By introducing the name of Hengist, Gower, in fact, belies more than a hint of treachery and deceit skulking behind his election of poetic language.

Hengist was a 'linguistic father for medieval English'⁵⁷⁹ and his name, infamous in the fourteenth century, serves as an unfortunate reminder of the English languages' most ignoble and nefarious origin. Hengist and his brother Horsa were Saxon mercenaries invited to Britain to fight for Vortigern, the King of the Britons. The legend of the brothers and their subsequent conquest of Britain proved quite popular throughout the Middle Ages and is widely mentioned in sources such as Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum*; Nennius' *Historia Brittonum*; the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*; and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*.⁵⁸⁰ Versions of the story can also be found in Layamon's *Brut*, and amongst the works of William of Malmesbury and Robert of

⁵⁷⁸ Chaucer, 'Troilus and Criseyde' in *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), Book II, line 22.

⁵⁷⁹ Mary Catherine Davidson, *Medievalism, Multilingualism, and Chaucer* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p.65.

⁵⁸⁰ Other accounts can be found in and by: Æthelweard, *Chronicon Æthelwardi*; Henry of Huntingdon, *Historia Anglorum*; Geoffrey Gaimar, *L'Estoire des Engleis*; Wace, *Roman de Brut*; Ralph Higden, *Polychronicon*; Florence of Worcester, *Chronicon ex chronicis*; Matthew of Paris, *Historia Anglorum*; Walter of Coventry, *Memoriale fratris Walteri de Coventria*; John of Oxnead, *Chronica Johannis de Oxenedes*; *Livres de reis de Britannie*; Pierre de Langtoft, *Langtoft's Chronicle*; Matthew of Westminster, *Flores Historiarum*; Robert Manning of Brunne, *Mannyng's Chronicle*; John of Fordun, *Chronica Gentis Scotorum*; Jehan de Wavrin, *Recueil des croniques et anchiennes istories de la Grant Bretagne*; *Brut of England*; *Histoire de Merlin*; *Arthour and Merlin*; Henry Lovelich, *Merlin*. For differences between them all see Nellie Slayton Aurner, *Hengest: A Study in Early English Hero Legend*, University of Iowa Studies Vol. II, No.1 (Iowa City, IA: Iowa University Press, 1921).

Gloucester. The story claims that Hengist, described twice in Layamon's *Brut* as 'cnihten alre swikelest' (most deceitful warrior)⁵⁸¹, had increasingly manipulated Vortigern into giving him more and more lands. Through his clever marrying off of his daughter Rowena to Vortigern he managed to become the first King of Kent. Relationships broke down between the Britons and the Saxons, however, and Hengist requested a banquet, which would also serve as a mutual peace treaty. But, unbeknownst to the Britons, the Saxons were secretly armed with long knives hidden on their persons to be drawn only at a prearranged signal - 'Nimeð eoure sexes'⁵⁸². The Britons were unable to understand the Saxon language and thus would not be able to interpret the signal accurately and, indeed, Hengist wholly relied on this failure of understanding between the two foreign languages. During the feast, then, on the given signal and command by Hengist, the Saxon army pulled out their long knives and massacred the unwitting and unarmed Britons sitting next to them. As Nellie Slayton Aurner observes, Hengist appears in the later chronicles as the 'embodiement of craft, treachery and destructive power'.⁵⁸³ Thus, Gower, consciously commences the entire *Confessio* with a reference to a violent pagan conquest, an English *translatio imperii*, which would eventually crush and drive the oppressed Christianized Britons to the outskirts of Wales, remnants of which emerge in his 'Tale of Constance'. Furthermore, Gower's reference to Hengist marks the beginning of his poem with a uniquely English and dishonourable yet powerful act of linguistic treachery and semiotic trickery. This, without question, casts a long dark shadow over all aspects of the poem thereafter.

Gower also invokes two other names, that of Brutus and Carmentis.⁵⁸⁴ Brutus is the legendary, albeit apocryphal, eponymous founder of Britain and Nova Troy, later renamed as London. Gower alludes to Brutus again in the Prologue, this time specifically associating him with New Troy/London 'Under the toun of newe Troye, / Which took of Brut his ferste joye' (CA, Prologue*, 37-38). His story is most famously recorded, like that of Hengist, in Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae* which details his ancestry as coming from the great warrior Aeneas, the son of Venus and the renowned founder of Italy and hero of Troy. Carmentis, who takes her name from the word for song,

⁵⁸¹ Layamon, *Brut*, MS Cotton Caligula, Lines 7595, 8132.

⁵⁸² Layamon, *Brut*, MS Cotton Caligula, Line 7611.

⁵⁸³ Aurner, *Hengist: A Study*, p.8.

⁵⁸⁴ Siân Echard declares Carmentis as Gower's poetic muse for the *Confessio* in Siân Echard, 'With Carmen's Help: Latin Authorities in the Confessio Amantis', *Studies in Philology*, 95.1 (1998), 1-40 (p.4).

and in turn poetry, is the Roman goddess of childbirth and prophecy and is reputed to have invented the Latin letters which, of course, signals the bilingual nature of the poem. Gower describes her invention in Book IV as ‘made of hire engine’ and I argue in Chapter Three that the poet consciously associates her with deceit, artifice, and guile. Both Brutus and Carmentis are exiles, as Matthew Irvin points out,⁵⁸⁵ Brutus from Troy and Carmentis banished, possibly for murder, with her son Evander from Arcadia, which in Virgil’s *Eclogues* is transformed into an idyllic and bucolic paradise. Both, more importantly, alert the reader of Gower’s *Confessio* to the presence of mythological writing. Brutus through his kinship with Aeneas and Troy ultimately leads back to Virgil and his great epic mythological poem the *Aeneid* and Carmentis is found in the *Fasti* by that other illustrious Roman writer of mythological fables, Ovid.⁵⁸⁶ Gower, at this early stage, directs his reader not only towards the language of his work and all the problems that may entail, but also the imaginary, indeed fabulous, content contained in the poem. Rather than helping to clarify an already unstable allusion to the language of his choice, encapsulated in the disreputable name of Hengist, the references to Brutus and Carmentis only serve to muddy the water of truth and create a greater unease at the outset of the poem. What we find is a triumvirate of ignominious and dishonest exiles, Hengist, Brutus, Carmentis, and their respective languages, English and Latin, equal in their opprobrium and, therefore, equal in their failure to be the authoritative voice in the text.⁵⁸⁷ Its effect serves only to create multiplicity not unity.

This ‘unease’ culminates in the final two lines of the Latin heading with a direct request against misreading which by its very presence almost constitutes an expectation in some way of a misunderstanding of what is to come: ‘Let then the boneless one that breaks bones with speeches be absent / and let the interpreter wicked in word stand far away’. The ‘boneless one’ is the tongue and Gower writes similarly in his *Vox Clamantis* V 921-22 that ‘Res mala lingua loquax, res peior, pessima res est, / Que quamuis careat ossibus, ossa terit’ [A prattling tongue is a bad thing, a worse thing, and the worst thing; however much it may lack bones itself, it can break bones]. At the conclusion to the first

⁵⁸⁵ Irvin, *Poetic Voices*, p.43. Brutus is exiled from Italy after he accidentally kills his father with an arrow and Carmentis is exiled from Arcadia. Irvin also points out that Hengist is equally an exile from Saxony.

⁵⁸⁶ Ovid, *Fasti*, i.461-542.

⁵⁸⁷ Many scholars have viewed Gower’s Latin as a stabilizing force for the unruliness of his English. Derek Pearsall writes that his Latin acts as a ‘fixative’ for his ‘slippery vernacular’, ‘Gower’s Latin in the *Confessio Amantis*’, in *Latin and Vernacular: Studies in Late-Medieval Texts and Manuscripts* ed. A.J. Minnis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1989), pp.13-25, p.17.

Latin heading, Gower has become openly suspicious of words themselves and entreats that there be no deceit present, that the ‘wicked tongue’ of lies is absent. I have argued earlier, in Chapter Two, that this ‘wicked tongue’, this sinful speech is a direct allusion to the post-lapsarian word that disrupts meaning and through its corporeal nature conceals truth. A post-lapsarian word that is ineluctably unable to signify internal thoughts adequately on its own. These lines are, in fact, attributed to the alleged proverbs of the Old English King Alfred.⁵⁸⁸ In reality, it is a Middle English collection of sayings in alliterative verse from the twelfth or thirteenth century with no real attachment to Alfred at all.⁵⁸⁹ But as the poem *The Owl and the Nightingale* demonstrates, Alfred had a reputation as a proverb teller throughout the Middle Ages.⁵⁹⁰ In this particular proverb, which Skeat editorally titles ‘Let thy words be few’, the anonymous poet writes:

Mid fewe worde wis mon
 fele biluken wel con;
 and sottes bolt is sone i-schote
 for-þi ich holde hine for dote
 þat sayþ al his will
 þanne he scholde beon stille
 For ofte tunge brekeþ bon,
 þeyh heo seolf nabbe mon. (A 22, 419-426)⁵⁹¹

⁵⁸⁸ Irvin, *Poetic Voices*, p.52. Macaulay finds a reference to Proverbs 25:15 ‘patientia lenietur princeps et lingua mollis confringet duritiam’ [By patience a prince shall be appeased, and a soft tongue shall break hardness.], Macaulay, *Complete Works*, Pr.i.5n). Echard and Fanger find it is similar to Ecclesiasticus 28:21 ‘plaga autem linguae comminuet ossa’ [but the stroke of the tongue will break the bones], Siân Echard and Claire Fanger, *The Latin Verses in the Confessio Amantis* (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press Inc., 1991), xxxvii.

⁵⁸⁹ The *Proverbs of Alfred* survive in four thirteenth-century manuscripts: Cotton Galba A. xix (MS C); Maidstone Museum A.13 (MS M); Cambridge, Trinity College, B.14.39 (MS T); Oxford, Jesus College, 29 (MS J), see Robert Allen Rouse, *The idea of Anglo-Saxon England in Middle English Romance*. (Woodbridge: D.S. Brewer, 2005).

⁵⁹⁰ For more on King Alfred’s reputation see Simon Keynes, ‘The Cult of King Alfred the Great’, in *Anglos Saxon England*, ed. Michael Lapidge, Vol. 28 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp.225-356. See *The Owl and the Nightingale*, ed. E.G. Stanley (London: Nelson, 1960).

⁵⁹¹ Walter Skeat, *The Proverbs of Alfred* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907).

Gower chooses to close his opening Latin verse to the whole poem with an evocation of a proverb that extolls the virtues of silence over speech. But Gower goes further and chooses to translate this particular proverb from early Middle English (yet attributed to an Old English King), to transfer its meaning, into what Siân Echard calls ‘technically complex and elusive Latin elegiac couplets’⁵⁹² and which Derek Pearsall finds himself ‘tempted to believe [...] was not merely difficult to understand but not meant to be understood.’⁵⁹³ Here Gower, through his English content, unnaturally couples Hengist and Carmentis and the result is a confusing and chaotic Babel-like hermeneutic conundrum. Both Echard and Fanger together write that ‘if the Latin verses of the *Confessio* are written in a style that may occasionally seem difficult, over-elaborate, or even awkward or wordy, closer scrutiny reveals that many of these instances of apparent awkwardness, of odd word choice, or of unusual syntax, are in fact the result of hidden jokes, paronomasia, or complex puns’ and that ‘in some verses, Gower seems deliberately to evoke the puzzling yet suggestive obscurity that is a normal feature of any riddle’.⁵⁹⁴ Indeed, in this initial header, Gower’s puzzle is purposeful. His engagement with subtle and complex rhetorical devices, in this short verse, such as *antanaclasis* and *polyptoton* operate to make his translation even more enigmatic and riddling than the original ever was. A riddle or proverb, of course, requires complex interpretation to be fully understood, so as to unravel or solve its true content. By deliberately perplexing the audience here, Gower offers a clever exercise to demonstrate the inherent problems of translation. These opening lines, through the form of the riddle and its subject matter, further highlight, by example, Gower’s concerns regarding the ambiguity of language, the ability to confound meaning through speech and written words, and the ultimate uncertainty surrounding accurate interpretation.

Several lines later, in Middle English, in the Ricardian recension, Gower reiterates and reinforces the equivocal nature of language, again imploring against his words being insidiously misconstrued. He writes:

And eek my fere is wel the lasse

⁵⁹² Siân Echard, ‘With Carmen’s Help’, p.4.

⁵⁹³ Derek Pearsall, ‘Gower’s Latin in the *Confessio Amantis*’, p.17.

⁵⁹⁴ Echard and Fanger, *The Latin Verses*, p.xxxix.

That non envye schal compasse
 Without a resonable wite
 To feyne and blame that I write.
 A gentil herte his tunge stilleth,
 That it malice noon distilleth,
 But preyseth that is to be preised;
 But he that hath his word unpeysed
 And handeleth onwrong every thing,
 I pray unto the heven king
 Fro such tungen He me schilde. (CA, Prologue*, 57-67)⁵⁹⁵

Gower still has ‘Alfred’s’ proverb on his mind, here, with his line ‘A gentil herte his tunge stilleth’ (CA, Prologue*, 61). It seems for Gower, as it was for the anonymous ‘Alfredian’ poet, silence is the only cure for ‘wicke’ words, the post-lapsarian word. In the subsequent lines, Gower acknowledges that deceitful words are not only rife in his contemporary world but, in fact, have overwhelmed his current society ‘And natheles this world is wilde / Of such jangling’ (CA, Prologue*, 68-69). For Gower, perverse words beget a perverse world and at this early stage of the poem, his petitions against misapprehension appear to be a futile battle against untruth.

The opening of the Middle English Prologue equally points towards the ‘word’ and in particular, in this case, the written word from the past ‘Of hem that writen ous tofore / The bokes duelle, and we therefore / Ben tawht of that was write tho’ (CA,

⁵⁹⁵ Macaulay termed the different drafts of the *Confessio* recensions. There are forty-nine full manuscripts of the *Confessio* with an additional eight manuscripts that include excerpts. Though the dates are the subject of ardent scholarly debate, the first recension, of which there are thirty-two manuscripts, is traditionally thought to have been composed between 1386 and 1390. The second recension, of which there are seven manuscripts, is generally believed to have been revised some time after 1390. The third recension, of which there are ten manuscripts, changes the dedication from King Richard to Henry, count of Derby, substitutes a verse in praise of England for the meeting of Richard on the Thames, and deletes an encomium on Chaucer. It is thought to have been revised in 1392. Russell Peck in his edition uses a third recension manuscript Fairfax 3. Bodleian Library as his base text. Any deviation from this recension is marked with an asterisk (*).

Prologue, 1-3). Gower establishes a crucial relationship between the written word and teaching and with that particular goal in mind he wishes to create ‘Forthi good’ (CA, Prologue, 4) fresh material so that ‘In oure tyme among ous hiere / Do wryte of newe som matiere’ (CA, Prologue, 5-6). He additionally desires that his attempt at ‘som newe thing’ (CA, Prologue*, 51) should not only edify the current reader but continue to be of use in the future also ‘So that it myhte in such a wyse, / Whan we ben dede and elleswhere, / Beleve to the worldes eere / In tyme comende after this’ (CA, Prologue, 8-11). This new ‘matiere’ should be ‘Essampled of these olde wyse’ (CA, Prologue, 7) which perhaps is referring to the exempla, mostly Ovidian in this case, Gower takes from the literature of the past. But it further highlights the ‘ensample’ contained within the current work, an ‘ensample’ for future audiences to take.

The inclusion of the term ‘essampled’ further suggests Gower’s morally didactic intentions and Elizabeth Allen remarks that ‘a narrative is exemplary in as much as a general truth gives rise to and shapes the way in which the particular is used’. However, ‘Medieval exempla in particular, initially written for a specifically religious rhetorical context have long been described as subordinate to doctrinal truths’⁵⁹⁶ a debate that emerged most prominently in the fourteenth century. To further attain his didactic ambition, Gower has elected to go ‘the middel weie’ (CA, Prologue, 17) that is to instruct through a very precise formula that is ‘Somwhat of lust, somewhat of lore’ (CA, Prologue, 19). This is a lofty ambition, to balance instruction with delight, form with content. It is a rhetorical strategy, as Russell Peck calls it, purporting to edify or profit through pleasure and ‘part of a radically new fourteenth-century philosophy of reading (albeit based on ancient literary principles), a method that might be labelled phenomenological epistemology’.⁵⁹⁷ This ancient literary principle originates with Horace, who first writes that ‘Non satis est pulchra esse poemata; dulcia sunt / et, quocumque uolent, animum auditoris agunt.’⁵⁹⁸ [It is not enough that poems be beautiful/let them be tender and affecting, and bear away the soul of the auditor whithersoever they please]⁵⁹⁹ (Ars Poetica 99-100). Of the poet he writes that ‘Aut famam

⁵⁹⁶ Elizabeth Allen, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), p.4.

⁵⁹⁷ Russell Peck, ed., *Confessio Amantis*, Vol. 1, p.13.

⁵⁹⁸ Latin text from <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/horace/arspoet.shtml>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

⁵⁹⁹ Translation from Horace, *The Works of Horace*, eds and trans C. Smart and Theodore Alois Buckley (New York, NY: Harper & Brothers, 1863).

sequere aut sibi conuenientia finge scriptor' [You, that write, either follow tradition, or invent such fables as are congruous to themselves] (119-120) and most famously that 'Aut prodesse uolunt aut delectare poetae / aut simul et iucunda et idonea dicere uitae' [Poets wish either to profit or to delight; or to deliver at once both the pleasures and the necessities of life] (333-335) and again that 'Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci, / lectorem delectando pariterque monendo' [He who joins the instructive with the agreeable, carries off every vote, by delighting and at the same time admonishing the reader] (343-344). Boccaccio, obviously influenced by the Horation precept, in the Proem to his *Decameron* states that with his 'hundred stories or fables or parables or histories' he wishes to entertain as well as teach. He writes that 'In reading them, the aforesaid ladies will be able to derive, not only pleasure from the entertaining matters therein set forth, but also some useful advice.'⁶⁰⁰ Boccaccio further argues vehemently for the didactic usefulness of the poet in his *Genealogy of the Gods*. Here, he elaborately attempts to rescue the disreputable word 'fable' from associations with lies as well as endeavouring to show the possibility of attaining truth through the 'veil of fiction'. At times his argument becomes strained but he, nonetheless, undertakes to elevate the status of secular literature going so far as to declare that 'poetry is theology and theology is poetry'.⁶⁰¹

Boccaccio is rather controversially reacting to long-standing criticism of literature and fiction by St Jerome and St Augustine (which I have detailed in Chapter One) who both charged it with being linguistically obscure and temporally distracting. Indeed, it was this ability of poetry, as Horace reveals, to 'bear the soul away' that was the exact source of its problem. As Allen writes 'in the Middle Ages [...] the object of suspicion was associated [...] with the fabulous and pagan - that is, early Christian thinkers from Augustine onward associated poetry with pagan texts about the distinctly fictive world of multiplicitous gods and magical transformations (*fabulae*). The suspicion of such fictional representations which might lead audiences astray, resurfaced in academic commentary.'⁶⁰² The mixing of religious doctrine with secular *fabulae* as exempla was a particularly contentious issue that was highly debated in the fourteenth century and was

⁶⁰⁰ Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G.H. McWilliam (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1972, repr. 1995), p.3.

⁶⁰¹ Charles G. Osgood, ed. and trans., *Boccaccio On Poetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1930), Chapter 14.

⁶⁰² Allen, *False Fables*, p.12.

an accusation launched specifically at the friars and their sermons. The Council of Salzburg of 1386 declared that ‘these false prophets [friars] by their sermons full of fables often lead astray the soul of their hearers’ and subsequently forbid them from preaching and hearing confession. John Wycliffe was a vociferous opponent to this admixture of secular and spiritual in sermons not only in those of friars but all preachers. He condemned outright the use of exempla which he classified as ‘fablis’ and “‘lesyngis of menys tradicions”, “cronyclis and poisies and newe fyndynges of dede men”. Those who tell such stories seek their own gain in the form of worldly power, including monetary gain.’⁶⁰³ Allen observes that exempla led their hearers away from the truth in the bible.⁶⁰⁴ This debate may well be what Jean de Meun is responding to through his passage in *Le Roman de la Rose* between Raison and Amant.

According to Gower, the post-lapsarian ‘word’ is responsible for the chaos of the world. Gower identifies the the loss of truth in language and the difficulties of semiotic hermeneutics as the key problems that affect all three major constituents of society that are outlined in the Prologue: ‘The State’, ‘The Church’, and ‘The Commons’. In an extended Latin heading to ‘The State’ Gower writes:

Tempus preteritum presens fortuna beatum
 Linqvit, et antiquas vertit in orbe vias.
 Progenuit veterem concors dileccio pacem,
 Dum facies hominis nuncia mentis erat:
 Legibus unicolor tunc temporis aura refulsit,
 Iusticie plane tuncque fuere vie.
 Nuncque latens odium vultum depingit amoris,
 Paceque sub ficta tempus ad arma tegit;
 Instar et ex variis mutabile Cameliontis

⁶⁰³ Allen, *False Fables*, p.13.

⁶⁰⁴ Allen, *False Fables*, p.13.

Lex gerti, et regnis sunt noua iura nouis:

Climata que fuerant solidissima sicque per orbem

Soluuntur, nec eo centra quietis habent. (CA, Prologue, ii)

[Present-day Fortune has left behind the blessed times of the past, and overturned on her world-wheel the ancient ways. Harmonious love engendered the old-time peace, when the face was the messenger of a person's thought: then the unicoloured air of the times was aglow with laws, and then the paths of justice were broad and even. But now hidden hatred presents a painted face of love, and clothes under false peace an age at arms. The law carries itself like the chameleon, changeable with every varied thing; and new laws are for new kingdoms. Regions that were most steady throughout the world's orb are unmoored, nor do they possess axis-points of quiet.]

Gower conjures up a blessed past filled with peace, love, and harmony, where a person's countenance perfectly conveyed the inner thought. This image offers a striking resemblance to Augustine's account of the Fall in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* when he writes that 'Deus corpora eorum in istam mortalitatem carnis mutavit, ubi latent corda mendacia' [God changed their [Adam and Eve's] bodies into this mortal flesh in which deceitful hearts are hidden] (DGM, II, 21.32). In the absence of external language, he writes: 'Neque enim in illis corporibus coelestibus sic latere posse cogitationes credendum est, quemadmodum in his corporibus latent: sed sicut nonnulli motus animorum apparent in vultu, et maxime in oculis, sic in illa perspicuitate ac simplicitate coelestium corporum omnes omnino motus animi latere non arbitror' [For we should not believe that thoughts could be hidden in those heavenly bodies, as they lie hidden in these bodies. Rather some states of the soul are apparent on the countenance, especially in the eyes, so I think that in the clarity and simplicity of those heavenly bodies absolutely no states of the soul are hidden] (DGM, II, 21.32). The similarity shows that Gower may be referencing Adam and Eve's harmonious and peaceful life in Paradise when the internal thought of the soul was truthfully displayed via facial features in lieu of external

language. In the post-lapsarian world, in the current corrupted time, there is a break between inner and outer, signified and signifier. The internal thought no longer truthfully represents the outward expression. With the onset of the fleshly body, thoughts can now be concealed, Gower tells us. Internal hatred is now veiled with a fictional expression, painted faces and clothing - the terminology of rhetorical artifice and integument. In Middle English Gower reiterates these sentiments, contrasting this Edenic past with the contemporary 'now', a decidedly degenerated present. He underscores the loss of correlation between signified and signifier as the core reason for this decay.

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
The world is changed overal. (CA, Prologue, 111-119).

Gower's metaphor of the crop lying under the root, the head lying at the bottom and the bottom now at the top, is indicative of a topsy-turvy world. The world that is 'changed overal' represents a world of fallible human judgement and interpretation, where things are seen in reverse.

This world of misinterpretation and upside-down understanding dominates Gower's section on 'The Church' as well. He writes that the clergy 'feignen chalk for chese' (CA, Prologue, 416) and that 'Men sen the merel [*token/sign*] al mysdrawe' (CA, Prologue, 430). He writes scathingly of the corruption of the Church in linguistic terms:

And holy cherche [...]
Which scheweth outward a visage
Of that is nought in the corage.
For if men loke in holy cherche,
Between the word and that thei werche
Ther is a full gret difference.
Thei prechen ous in audience
That no man schal his soule empeire,
For al is bot a chirie feire
This worldes good, so as thei telle;
Also thei sein ther is an helle,
Which unto mannes sinne is due
And bidden ous therefore eschue
That wikkid is, and do the goode.
Who that here wordes understode,
It thinketh thei wolden do the same;
Bot yet between earnest and game
Ful ofte it torneth otherwise. (CA, Prologue, 446-463)

The hypocrisy of the church is described as the great chasm between inner and outer, signified and signifier, the difference between word and deed. The clergy conceal thoughts with fictional faces, words and actions that are in opposition to each other.

‘The Commons’ are described similarly:

And natheless yet som men wryte
And sein that fortune is to wyte

And som men holde opinion
That it is constellacion,
Which causeth al that a man doth.
God wot of bothe which is soth.
The world as of his proper kynde
Was evere untrewē, and as the blynde
Impropelych he demeth fame,
He blameth that is noght to blame
And preiseth that is noght to preise.
Thus whan he schal the thinges peise,
Ther is deceiptē in his balance. (CA, Prologue, 529-541)

Gower describes how the common people actively misinterpret the signs of the world, thinking that Fortune is to blame for all the ills that beset them. They erroneously look to the stars, the constellations, and the signs of the zodiac as things that have control over men's wills and as the answer to the cause of the degeneration of society. As a result, man's judgement is skewed and writers memorialize and make famous those that don't deserve to be, blame those that shouldn't be blamed and praise those that shouldn't be praised. These lines appear quite strongly to be an outright criticism of contemporary poetry referring, in particular, to epideictic rhetoric, the art of praise or blame used most often in poetry. And this gross poetic error, the substitution of a house of lies for the house of fame, Gower tells us, results in an imbalance in the world.

ARION'S 'LUSTI MELODIE'

At the conclusion to the Prologue of the *Confessio Amantis*, Gower appears to offer an uncharacteristically optimistic vision of *pax* and *harmonia* through his inclusion of the exemplar of Arion. Gower writes that 'Bot wolde God that now were on / An other such

as Arion' (Prologue, 1054) who with his harp 'of such temprure' (1055) and with his voice 'of so good mesure' (1056):

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
And putte away malencolie.
That was a lusti melodie' (CA, Prologue, 1057-1070)

This passage follows a harsh and lengthy admonition of the current state of division and corruption of the Church as well as the apocalyptic degeneration of Empire through the description of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the metallurgic composite statue of man. A curious and uncommon medieval literary figure, the story of Arion, nonetheless, was well known to the Greek world through Herodotus' *Histories* (Book I 23-24). The historian writes that Arion was celebrated as the most exceptional lyre player of his age and was the first founder of the *dithyramb* (a cyclic chorus or hymn usually dedicated to Apollo). Arion's fame grew so great that his voice and music was much sought after. He travelled to Italy and Sicily and there, through his incredible musical skill, both earned and won a

considerable amount of money. From here, the tale goes, he hired a crew of Corinthian sailors to take him to Corinthos. However, once they were at sea the sailors plot to steal his money and cast him overboard. On discovering this treachery Arion earnestly implores them to take his money in return for his life. But the pirates refuse and instead demand that Arion kill himself on the boat or immediately jump overboard. Arion asks, if he could play one last song before he acquiesces to taking his own life. The sailors agree, keen to hear the most gifted musician and singer there is, and Arion takes up his lyre and plays for them a stirring song before throwing himself into the sea. The sailors then move on but, unbeknownst to them, a passing dolphin who had been so enamoured with Arion's music takes him on his back and miraculously saves him by returning him to dry land. Herodotus' text undoubtedly contributed greatly to the ancient world's knowledge of this story, particularly in the Greek world, as allusions to Arion's tale can later be found in the works of Plato and Claudian.

Russell Peck and Robert Yeager argue that Gower's source for the tale of Arion comes not through the Greek but the Latin world⁶⁰⁵ and the most influential Latin text which references Arion is Ovid's *Fasti*, a work, which Yeager remarks, 'Gower seems to have had nearly by heart'.⁶⁰⁶ Peck tells us that 'the story is well known in the later Middle Ages and appears in collections of Latin moralized tales such as those described in the *British Museum Catalogue of Romances* and in some versions of the *Gesta Romanorum*'⁶⁰⁷ but Yeager points out that Gower's use of Arion, rather than the 'better known musician/poet figures such as Amphion, David, and Orpheus,' is very unusual in Middle English literature.⁶⁰⁸ Less interested in the source than the purpose, Yeager poses the pertinent question 'why did Gower choose Arion?' Indeed, considering the scarcity of the representation of the Arion figure, Yeager has surmised that the abstruse personage that is Arion was chosen because 'unlike King David, whose checkered reputation as a wise man besotted by women would perhaps have limited his symbolic usefulness, or Orpheus, who also came freighted with diverse, predetermined iconography, Arion offered in effect a clean slate' to Gower thereby allowing the poet to in fact self-identify

⁶⁰⁵ Russell Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit*, pp.22-23; R.F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion*, (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1990), p.239.

⁶⁰⁶ Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic*, p.239.

⁶⁰⁷ Peck, *Confessio Amantis*, Vol. 1, p.253.

⁶⁰⁸ Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic*, p. 240.

with the recondite musician while he endeavours to write his own poetic vernacular love song.⁶⁰⁹

In contrast to Yeager, Ann Astell has made a compelling argument for the tale of Arion actually being at the forefront of the minds of a London audience, and an inspiration for Gower, through the presence, according to Thomas Walsingham's *Historia Anglicana*, during Christmas 1391/92, of an actual dolphin in the Thames River. She writes that 'if the exotic appearance of a dolphin in London at Yuletide led Walsingham to mention the event in his chronicle and to quote Pliny at length, we may well imagine that it was the talk of the town. Grammar school teachers throughout the city probably seized the opportunity to expound on the subject of dolphins to interested students, while lay clerks like Gower recalled and discussed pertinent passages not only in Pliny's *Historia* but also in Ovid's *Fasti*. However, this dolphin episode in London, relies on a radical re-dating of not only the first but all three recensions of the *Confessio Amantis* (as all three contain the story of Arion in the Prologue) to some time after Christmas 1391/92. The first recension is conventionally dated to 1390 even though, as Astell writes there is 'no strong basis for [this] dating ... despite the scholarly habit of doing so'.⁶¹⁰

Gower offers us a utopic vision of a world free of division, hatred, predation, and social estates. Man and beast, rich and poor, noble and peasant, nature and humanity, are united by the power of Arion's measured and tempered harp playing. In Book II of the *Fasti*, though devoid of Gower's human inclusion, we still find that Ovid presents an incredibly similar picture of the unifying force of Arion's music:

quod mare non novit, quae nescit Ariona tellus?
carmine currentes ille tenebat aquas.
saepe sequens agnam lupus est a voce retentus,
saepe avidum fugiens restitit agna lupum;
saepe canes leporesque umbra iacuere sub una,
et stetit in saxo proxima cerva leae (*Fasti*, II 83-88).

⁶⁰⁹ Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic*, p.240.

⁶¹⁰ Ann Astell, *Political Allegory in Late Medieval England*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1999), p.78.

[What land or sea does not know of Arion? He could hold back the running waters with his singing. Often the wolf seeking a lamb was halted by his voice, Often the lamb stopped, in fleeing the ravening wolf. Often hare and hounds rested in the same covert, and the deer on the rock stood still near the lioness]⁶¹¹

This communal love, this coming together of all creatures, presents itself again in a remarkably comparable passage in Ovid's earlier work *Ars Amatoria*, wherein he describes a glorious and more innocent past to his contemporary world:

Arte Venus nulla dulce peregit opus
Ales habet, quod amet; cum quo sua gaudia iungat,
Invenit in media femina piscis aqua;
Cerva parem sequitur, serpens serpente tenetur,
Haeret adulterio cum cane nexa canis;
Laeta salitur ovis: tauro quoque laeta iuvenca est
Sustinet inmundum sima capella marem;
In furias agitantur equae, spatioque remota
Per loca dividos amne sequuntur equos. (*Ars Amatoria*, Bk II, 480-88)

[Venus did her work without sweet art. Birds have mates to love: in the midst of waters a fish will find another to share her joy: hind follows stag, snake will bind with snake, bitch clings entwined with some adulterous dog: ewes delight in being covered: bulls delight in heifers, too, the snub-nosed she-goat supports her rank mate: Mares driven to frenzy follow their stallion, through distant places beyond the branching river.]⁶¹²

⁶¹¹ Ovid, *Fasti*, trans. A.S. Kline, <<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

⁶¹² Ovid, *Ars Amatoria*, trans. A.S. Kline, <<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

Though these potent sexual images of lustful animal desire are entirely absent from the Arion passage in both Ovid's and Gower's work, the prevalence, nonetheless, of a communal love, harmonizing peace, and freedom from strife is a core concept of the Classical Golden Age. It is a common trope found in the earliest to the latest versions of the idea of the Golden Age from Homer's Elysian Fields in the *Odyssey*, Hesiod's *Works and Days*, Horace's writings on retirement, Virgil's description of Elysium in the *Aeneid*, or Claudian's *hortus conclusus* of Venus' bower, medieval passages on a Court of Love or Nature's realm, or Christian poet's version of the earthly paradise - they all unanimously involve some ideal of love or harmony.⁶¹³

Indeed, Horace who alongside with Ovid was the most influential of Roman poets on the subject of the Golden Age in his Sixteenth Epode presents a similar vision of refuge and peace from the carnage of the Civil War. The description of life beyond the 'Etruscan shore' includes the standard ingredients in the recipe for a happy life: beautiful nature, fecund earth, ideal weather, and most importantly the same peaceable kingdom of Gower's and Ovid's Arionic descriptions - with a specific harmony among all living creatures. He writes:

illic iniussae veniunt ad mulctra capellae
refertque tenta grex amicus ubera
nec vespertinus circumgemit ursus ovile
nec intumescit alta viperis humus (Epode XVI, 49-52)

[There the goats come, without being told, to the milking pail, And the willing flock returns with swelling udders, No bears roam growling round the sheep-fold when evening falls, Nor is the higher ground swollen thick with vipers]⁶¹⁴

⁶¹³ A. Bartlett Giamatti, *The Earthly Paradise and the Renaissance Epic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966), p.84.

⁶¹⁴ Horace, *Epodes*, trans. A.S. Kline, <<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

This golden age harmony comes as a call to escape to the Islands of the Blessed - the locus for Horace's Golden Age, a haven away from and in opposition to the corrupted land characterised by unnatural and monstrous animal desires. He further writes:

novaque monstra iunxerit libidine
mirus amor, iuuet ut tigris subsidere cervis,
adulteretur et columba miluo (Epode XVI, 30-32)

[When unnatural affection mates monsters together in strange desire, so tigers will long to take deer, and the doves will delight in union with kites.]⁶¹⁵

Likewise, Virgil's famous Messianic Fourth Eclogue (ca. 40 B.C.), written about the same time as the imagistically similar Horace's Sixteenth Epode, describes the return of a fertile Saturnian Golden Age and Virgil writes:

ipsae lacte domum referent distenta capellae
ubera, nec magnos metuent Armenta leones (Eclogue IV lines, 21-22)

[She-goats unshepherded will bring home udders plumped. With milk, and cattle will not fear the lion's might]⁶¹⁶

Gower's intertextuality, here, is not an innocent or accidental plagiarism of the works of the great Latin poets. On the contrary, Gower's adoption of the bucolic mode in this passage is conscious. He wants his audience to think of the classical depictions of the golden age, an audience that would understand the significance of his references. Elsewhere, in Gower's works he does not use Golden Age *figura* frivolously. Book I, Chapter I of the *Vox Clamantis* opens with a classical Ovidian description of perpetual springtime nature. Its irenic overtones and explicit imagery of efflorescence, fecundity,

⁶¹⁵ Horace, *Epodes*, trans. A.S. Kline, <<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

⁶¹⁶ Virgil, *Eclogues*, trans. Guy Lee, (Middlesex: Penguin, 1980, repr. 1984), pp.56-57.

and plenitude are taken almost entirely word for word from Ovid's description of the Saturnian Golden Age in *Metamorphoses* I (VC, Book 1, Chapter 1, 1-120). Gower intentionally contrasts the resplendence of Phoebus, with his gleaming golden chariot, golden axle, golden pole and wheels that flash with aureate splendour (VC, Book 1, Chapter 1, 21-24), with the ensuing black, dark, nightmare of the Peasants' Revolt. A nightmare where nature itself is turned upside down when bands of rebels transform into a disordered frenzy of brutal beasts. Here, order is pitched against chaos, love against hatred, and peace against war, with the aim of accentuating the degeneration of one state into another. Gower writes:

Pax perit atque quies Animalia namque pusilla

Intrepido corde bella tremenda ferunt:

Que fuerant prede nuper, sibi querere predas

Vidi, bet preda nulla resistiteis

Vidi nam catulos minimos agitare leonem,

Nec loca tuta sibi tunc leopardus habet:

Aspera grex ouium pastori cornua tendunt,

Cordis et effuse sanguine tincta madent: (VC, I, 1297-1304)

[Peace and quiet perished, for petty animals waged formidable war with undaunted spirit. I saw things which once had been prey seeking prey for themselves, and no prey withstood them. I saw the smallest whelps frighten the lion, and the leopard found no quarters safe for him then. The flock of sheep pointed its sharp horns at the shepherd, and they grew wet, stained by the blood which poured from his heart.]

The animal imagery in *Vox Clamantis* is analogous to the Arion passage, as is the employment of the rhetorical strategy of juxtaposition between light and dark, order and chaos. The arrangement is reversed and changed in the *Confessio* but, nonetheless, the effect is the same. This position of Arion in the Prologue of the *Confessio* allows Gower

to deliberately contrast this Arionic Arcadia, with the dark apocalyptic description of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the composite statue of man, taken from Daniel 2 (19-45). Kim Zarins writes that 'The Arion episode not only offers a social vision but an 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" [CA, Prologue, 1053].'⁶¹⁷ Gower's panegyric song on the pacificatory achievements of his hero Arion offers an emblematic reduction of Gower's prophetic hope, but crucially it is a pastoral prophecy that can only exist in poetic fiction of the past.

R. F. Yeager argues that a search for a 'new Arion' 'is the key to the *Confessio Amantis*' and that Gower imagines himself as an Arion figure.⁶¹⁸ He writes further that 'the search for the new Arion also provides our best explanation for the stylistic "middle weie" announced with such emphasis both in the first lines of the Prologue (12-21) and echoed, immediately following the call for Arion, in the opening passage of Book I (1-16). The book to be written "Somewhat of lust, somewhat of lore" (Prologue, 19) of course describes the *Confessio* - but it also implicitly suggests Amans/Gower as the desired Arion, and his confession, pointedly bounded and informed by the Prologue and Epilogue, as the eirenic song'.⁶¹⁹ Echard agrees, but highlights the conditional tense used in Gower's invocation of Arion 'wolde god now wer on / another such as Arion' (CA, Prologue, 1053-54). She writes that 'Gower may indeed be in search of a new Arion' arguing 'that he knows how difficult it will be to find him'.⁶²⁰ I concur that Gower yearningly looks for a poet who can unite and move people to peace with his 'carmines', but I argue strongly that Gower does not see the possibility at all of a return of an Arion in his current time. As I have shown, a close reading of this passage demonstrates that Gower intentionally references the golden-age poetic fabrications of Virgil, Horace, and Ovid. And Gower tells us explicitly that Arion's song is a 'lusti melodie' (CA, Prologue, 1070), a fiction. Chaucer places him alongside other musicians in the mutable *House of Fame* (III, 1203-05) and moreover, we find the Book of Daniel and the story of Arion uniquely juxtaposed, which has thus far been overlooked, in St Augustine's *De civitate Dei*. In Book I, Chapter 14, Augustine contrasts the biblical story of Daniel 3 with the

⁶¹⁷ Kim Zarins, 'Writing the Literary Zodiac', p.133.

⁶¹⁸ Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic*, p.238.

⁶¹⁹ Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic*, p.242.

⁶²⁰ Echard, *With Carmen's Help*, pp.29-30.

miraculous escape of Arion. His juxtaposition is strategic stating that the pagans would much rather believe the miraculous fiction of Arion than those of God such as the story of Sidrach, Misach, and Abdenago who survived Nebuchadnezzar's furnace by praying to God. He writes

Haec quoque illi, cum quibus agimus, malunt irridere quam credere, qui tamen suis litteris credunt Arionem Methymnaeum, nobilissimum citharistam, cum esset deiectus e navi, exceptum delphini dorso et ad terras esse pervectum

[These things, indeed, are turned to ridicule rather than credited by those with whom we are debating; though they believe what they read in their own books, that Arion of Methymna, the famous lyrist, when he was thrown overboard, was received on a dolphin's back and carried to land.]

Augustine uses the example of Arion to contrast fiction with biblical truth. This conjuring of a non-existent past, a mythological time period, reveals that Gower views the ability of language and poetry to move all creatures into virtuous action as merely 'fable', an unattainable fiction in the modern post-lapsarian world. Indeed, Gower ends the Prologue on a characteristically pessimistic note writing of a contemporary world that is in opposition to the Arionic paradise he has just described: 'Bot wher that wisdom waxeth wod, / And reson torneth into rage, / So that mesure upon outrage / Hath set his world, it is to drede' (CA, Prologue, 1078-1081). The story of Arion is the only Ovidian mythological fable in the whole Prologue, an intrusion on an otherwise serious section. It comes after the description of the semiotic, linguistic, and worldly decay of the biblical story of Nebuchadnezzar's dream, a story that Gower tells us stands in opposition to poetic fiction and is 'moste nedes be credible' (CA, Prologue, 574). The Prologue, Gower remarks, 'is so assised / That it to wisdom al belongeth' (CA, Prologue, 66-67) and therefore denotes his 'somewhat of lore' (CA, Prologue, 19). But here we find an interruption of that formula, an imposition of 'lust' on the aforementioned segment on

'lore'. Fiction derails the factual at the end of the Prologue and reigns until the interlude of Book VII and the end of the frame-narrative in the *Confessio*'s Epilogue in Book VIII.

THE FICTION OF THE FRAME NARRATIVE

This fiction and its battle with fact spills over into Book I. The voice of the lover declares from the outset that he will truthfully recount his own experience in love as a service to others:

And for to proven it is so,
I am miselven on of tho,
Which to this scole am underfonge.
For it is siththe go nocht longe,
As for to speke of this matiere,
I may you telle, if ye wolle hiere,
A wonder hap which me befell,
Touchende of love and his fortune,
The which me liketh to commune
And plainly for to telle it oute.
To hem that ben lovers aboute
Fro point to point I wol declare
And wryten of my woful care,
Mi wofull day, my wofull chance,
That men mowe take remembrance
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,
And that he wot of good apprise
To teche it forth, for such emprise
Is for to preise; and therefore I
Woll wryte and schew al openly
How love and I togedre mette
Wherof the world ensample fette
Mai after this, whan I am go (CA, I, 61-87)

As Echard observes ‘these twenty lines use verbs of telling, showing, and bearing witness repeatedly, apparently to establish the veracity of what is to come.’ He chooses the specific words and phrases of ‘proven’, ‘comune’, ‘pleinly for to telle’, ‘declare and wryten’, ‘in good feith’, and ‘I woll wryte and schew al openly’ as a way of demonstrating the factuality of his account. Yet, the tale and confession that follow are entirely fantastical, mythical, and above all fictional. Thus, the narrator, at the start of Book I, is exposed as unreliable, untrustworthy, and untruthful. This fiction is sustained in his ‘Complaint to Cupid and Venus’ (CA, I, 93-202). Here, the narrator thinks that he is a bona fide love-sick lover in a classic medieval love poem where he enters the *locus amoenus* in the ‘monthe of Maii / When every brid hath chose his make’ (CA, I, 100-101). Of course, as we find out in the epilogue, he is no such thing and in no such place. He finds instead a ‘silva oscura’ [dark wood] like that of Dante’s *Inferno* (1.2) or indeed the forest at the entrance to the classical underworld (Hades) as described by Virgil (*Aeneid* 6.179). Gower writes:

Bot as it were a man forfare
Unto the wode I gan to fare,
Noght for to singe with the briddes,
For whanne I was the wode amiddes,

I fond a swote grene pleine,
 And ther I gan my wo compleigne
 Wisshinge and wepinge al myn one,
 For other merthes made I none.
 So hard me was that ilke throw,
 That ofte sithes overthrowe
 To grounde I was withoute breth;
 And evere I wisshide after deth. (CA, I, 109-120).

Gower's forest is one of pain and distress and not full of the joys of lovers. The narrator complains 'For certes such a maladie / As I now have and longe have had, / It myhte make a wis man madd' (CA, I, 128-130). It appears that madness may already have set in as he misinterprets his own condition of old age for that of youthful love-sickness. In this way the narrator participates in the post-lapsarian and post-Babel topsy-turvy world of lapsed judgement and confusion. The narrator further erroneously believes that Cupid has 'a firy dart me thocht he hent / And threw it thurgh myn herte rote' (CA, I, 144-145). But Venus knows otherwise. She requests the narrator be honest with her 'Sche seide, "Tell thi maladie: / What is this or of which thou pleignest? / Ne hyd it nocht, for if thou feignest, / I can do thee no medicine' (CA, I, 164-167). He responds that he has dutifully served her court but she insinuates that he is, in fact, a false lover:

And seide, "Ther is manye of yow
Faitours, and so may be that thow
 Art rihte such on, and be *feintise*
 Seist that thou has me do servise."
 And natheles sche wiste wel. (CA, I, 173-176)⁶²¹

⁶²¹ Emphasis my own.

Venus' repetition of words that denote falsehood (*faitours*, *feintise*), in her speech to Amans, attempts to push him towards self-awareness and into an understanding of the sheer fiction of his situation. And Genius, like Venus, commands the lover to confess truthfully, exhorting that his shrift 'mot be plein, / It nedeth noght to make it queinte, / For trowthe hise wordes wol noght peinte' (CA, I, 282-284). But Amans is, unfortunately, resistant to correct understanding.

However, over twenty thousand lines later, when Genius concludes the confession with the 'Tale of Apollonius of Tyre' in Book VIII, Amans is still none the wiser regarding his own condition. He still believes himself to be a rejected lover that must win his lady by any means. He appears to have learned nothing and continues his complaint in the same way as it began in Book I:

And I have al my wit thurghsoght
Of love to beseche hire oght,
For al that evere I skile may,
I am concluded with a nay.
That o sillable hath overthrowe
A thousand wordes on a rowe
Of such as I best speke can (CA, VIII, 2045-2051)

Amans asks for more help from Genius as if the last twenty thousand lines never existed: 'Youre hole conseil I beseche, / That ye me be som weie teche / What is my beste, as for an ende' (CA, VIII 2057-59). Genius, slightly exasperated, implores that Amans 'unto the trouthe wende' (CA, VIII, 2060) and admits that Amans is so far gone that he 'ne myht thiself rekevere'. Amans will not learn anything, he says, because 'Whan he his herte hath noght witholde / Toward himself, al is in vein' (CA, VIII, 2124-2125).

Amans ‘for love, which that blind was evere’ (CA, VIII, 2130), at odds with his confessor now, feels that a poetic supplication to Venus and Cupid ought to aid his cause if Genius won’t help him anymore. He says:

Bot for final conclusion
I thenke a supplicacion
With pleine wordes and expresse
Wryte unto Venus the goddesse,
The which I preie you to bere
And bringe agein a good ansuere. (CA, VIII, 2183-2188)

And weeping on the green grass which, takes us right back to Amans’ state in Book I, Gower writes that Amans:

Fulfilt of loves fantasie,
And with the teres of myn ye
In stede of enke I gan to wryte
The wordes whiche I wolde endite
Unto Cupide and to Venus. (CA, VIII, 2211-2216)

Gower draws on the Latin poets here with his poetic trope of ‘ink of tears’ and, in particular, Ovid. In his *Heroides* III, Briseis, who later in medieval literature would erroneously morph into Criseyde, writes to Achilles that ‘quascumque adspicies, lacrimae fecere lituras; / sed tamen et lacrimae pondera vocis habent’⁶²² [Whatever you read, will

⁶²² Ovid, *Heroides*, <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ovid/ovid.her3.shtml>> [accessed September 29th 2017], III, lines 3-4.

be blotted with tears / but still even tears carry the weight of my voice].⁶²³ He writes of his exile in similar terms in his *Tristia* ‘neue liturarum pudeat; qui uiderit illas, / de lacrimis factas sentiat esse meis’⁶²⁴ [And don’t be embarrassed by blots. Let anyone who sees them sense they were due to my tears] (1.1. 14-15).⁶²⁵ Echoes of Chaucer’s epic love story *Troilus and Criseyde* are apparent here as well when in the first stanza he writes that ‘Thise woful vers, that wepen as I write’ (I. 7). Lydgate was equally fond of the image and writes in his *Fabula Duorum Mercatorum* ‘O weeping Mirre, now lat thy teerys reyne / Into myn ynke, so clubbyd in my penne, / That rowthe in swaggyng abrood make it renne (509-511).⁶²⁶ And in his *Temple of Glas* he writes ‘Nou lete [y]oure teris into myn inke reyne’ (961) and in the *Complaint of a Lover’s Life* writes ‘O Nyobe, let now thi teres reyn / Into my pen’ (178-9).⁶²⁷ Gower intentionally draws on this influential poetic trope of lovelorn and sobbing letter writing lovers to highlight how Amans views himself - as a tragic figure of unrequited love, a pathetic Troilus if you will.

Moreover, with this poetic conception of tearful verses we are, additionally, acutely reminded of Augustine who rebuked himself, in his *Confessiones* (1.13.21), for shedding tears over the literary death of Virgil’s Dido when he should have been shedding tears over his own death in not loving God. Thus, Amans, as Augustine did, has chosen *frui*, the earthly pleasure of the fictions of poetry over *uti*, the spiritual quest for theological truth. The culmination of Genius’ ‘moral’ teaching, his confession, has, therefore, utterly failed to direct Amans away from temporal and worldly distractions. Indeed, the culmination of his teaching is simply more words as Amans’ poetic supplication shows. This is a demonstration of Augustine’s central edict in *De magistro* that ‘verbis igitur nisi verba non discimus’ [from words we can only learn words] (11.36).

What follows is a twelve-stanza letter of complaint to Cupid and Venus, which deviates completely from the octosyllabic four-stress couplets rhyming scheme of the previous thirty two thousand verses. Here Gower writes in rhyme royal, a decasyllabic, seven line, iambic pentameter verse form that rhymes a-b-a-b-b-c-c. Chaucer is credited

⁶²³ Ovid, *Heroides*, trans. A.S. Kline, <<http://www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/Heroides1-7.htm>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

⁶²⁴ Ovid, *Tristia*, <<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/ovid/ovid.tristia1.shtml>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

⁶²⁵ Ovid, *The Poems of Exile*, trans. Peter Green (London: Penguin, 1994).

⁶²⁶ John Lydgate, *John Lydgate: Fabula Duorum Mercatorum and Guy of Warwyk*, ed. Pamela Farvolden (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2016).

⁶²⁷ John Norton-Smith, *John Lydgate Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966).

with its first use in English and its possible invention. He uses it in his *Anelida and Arcite*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and four stories in *The Canterbury Tales*: The Man of Law's Tale, The Clerk's Tale, The Prioress's Tale, and The Second Nun's Tale as well as some earlier balades and complaints.⁶²⁸ Very little scholarship has dwelled on this remarkable in-poem change of form. Of these particular verses, C.S. Lewis writes 'the different quality of these lines is largely due to the different metre; but if Gower can thus adapt himself with equal felicity to the two metres, and use two differing styles, then the style of his octosyllabics is art, not nature - or is nature in such a way as not to be the less art'. Unusually, for Lewis, he offers high praise for Gower writing that 'the rhetorical building of the clauses, are perfect in their own way as anything in Gower's narratives: more perfect than some of Chaucer's stanza work.'⁶²⁹ R.F. Yeager briefly registers the change of form and Martin Stevens argues that the adjective 'royal' in phrases for rhyme royal (as in balades ryale) derives from the practice of directing balades to royalty. He argues that this is demonstrated by Gower's rhyme royal poem *In Praise of Peace* which is dedicated to King Henry IV, and points out that his supplication in the *Confessio* is strictly a letter addressed to the Queen of Love, Venus.⁶³⁰ However, James Dean, writes that 'Gower exploited the form, [...] because he believed that rhyme royal was appropriate for certain kinds of occasional verse and for amorous lyrics'⁶³¹ The comparison with Chaucer is inevitable given his first use of the stanza form and Dean argues further that Gower's rhyme royal is entirely derivative of Chaucer's.⁶³² I don't dispute this given the dating of Chaucer's and Gower's poems, but would argue that Gower purposely and satirically takes advantage of Chaucer's earlier use of the form and, particularly, that of his most famous rhyme royal work *Troilus and Criseyde*. The 'supplicacioun' is an intimate insight into Amans' thought process and the form change signals to the audience his personal image of himself at that point in the poem. Through this romantic, lyrical, and high style of verse, it is revealed that Amans understands

⁶²⁸ For Chaucer's verse and form choices see Paul F. Baum, *Chaucer's Verse* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1961); Derek Brewer, *An Introduction to Chaucer* (London: Longman, 1984). For studies on rhyme royal see James Wimsatt 'Chaucer and His French Contemporaries', in *The Chaucer Newsletter* ii (1989): pp.1-2; Donald R. Howard, "Rhyme Royal and the London Puy", in *Chaucer: His Life, His Works, His World* (New York: Dutton, 1987), pp.266-68.

⁶²⁹ C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study in Medieval Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936, repr. 2013), p.255.

⁶³⁰ Martin Stevens, 'The Royal Stanza in Early English Literature', *PMLA*, 94 (1979) 62-76.

⁶³¹ James Dean, 'Gower, Chaucer, and Rhyme Royal', *Studies in Philology*, Vol. 88, No. 3 (Summer, 1991), 251-275 (p.252).

⁶³² Dean, 'Rhyme Royal', p.253.

himself only in terms of a great Virgilian epic and tragic hero worthy of rhyme royal - just like Troilus. Indeed, Gower wants his audience to picture such a youthful literary love-sick figure and in so doing comically exposes Amans for the old fraud that he is.

The poem, itself, is tonally plangent yet beautiful and elegant, brimming with ornate poetic images, high rhetorical style, enjambments indicative of the excess of Amans' character and petitions to mythological and fictional literary figures such as 'Pan' (CA, VIII, 2239), 'Jove' (CA, VIII, 2252), 'Satorne' (CA, VIII, 2275), 'Venus' (CA, VIII, 2294), 'Cupid' (CA, VIII, 2287), Danger (CA, VIII, 2285), Nature (CA, VIII, 2224; 2232) and the 'grete clerke Ovide' (CA, VIII, 2266). This is the epistle that Genius 'tok on hond' (CA, VIII, 2307), in diplomatic fashion, to present to his mistress Venus. It is evident that Amans has not developed as a character throughout the whole poem and at this end stage he remains adamant, still, that he is a lover that has been denied his rightful lady. He has learned nothing. Just as Raison is unable to teach Amant through her use of fable and integuments in the example from my Introduction, Genius' mixture of lust and lore has failed to impart any wisdom. Amans, like Amant, fixates on the 'lusti' parts of all the tales and as we have seen his ending 'supplicacioun' is crammed full of the mythological and fabulous fictional characters which he has been hearing about. His love poem becomes the pinnacle of his secular and temporal vanity. As he remarks several lines earlier 'For techinge of so wis a port / Is unto love of no desport' (CA, VIII, 2195-2196). Amans' judgment remains impaired, topsy-turvy suggestive of the post-lapsarian world.

Venus receives the woeful poetic letter and she sternly asks after reading it what his name is. He replies "'Ma dame", I seide, "John Gower"' (CA, VIII, 2321) thus revealing the foolish Amans to be, surprisingly, the poet John Gower who complained in the Prologue of that he 'seknesse have upon honde / And longe have had' (CA, Prologue, 61-62). The poet and his work, as a result, become entirely implicated in the fiction. Calling the poet by name, Venus disdainfully remarks that 'it is manye daies gon, / That thou amonges hem were on / Which of my court hast ben withholde' (CA, VIII, 2351-53) and that 'mi medicine is nocht to sieke / For thee and for such olde sieke' (CA, VIII, 2367-8). In a grand effort to make Amans/Gower understand his sorry plight of old age she scornfully says:

"Thou wost wel that I am Venus,

Which al only my lustes seche;
And wel I wot, thocht thou beseche
Mi love, lustes ben ther none,
Which I mai take in thi persone;
For loves lust and lockes hore
In chamber acorden neveremore,
And thogh thou feigne a yong corage,
It scheweth wel be the visage
That olde grisel is no fole” (CA, VIII, 2399-2407)

Venus chastises Amans/Gower for seeking her lusty medicine when he has no lust left in him at all. She accuses him of falsehood, of pretending to have a youthful interior when his exterior appearance, that natural sign, involuntarily reveals the lie. Venus repeats this image of inner versus outer, the pronounced disparity between external and internal through alchemical terminology ‘That outward feignen youthe so / And ben withinne of pore assay’ (CA, VIII, 2410-11). Like a false alchemist, Amans/Gower has tricked himself into thinking that he is youthful and full of life yet within, if tested, he will be proven to be contaminated and harbouring a hidden decay. What he thinks is gold is in reality lead. His golden age of youth is really a degenerated world of iron. He thinks he is capable of conquering the rose like Amant in *Le Roman de la Rose*, of plowing continuously with his stylus but Venus scathingly puns of Old Amans ‘Bot mor behoveth to the plowh / Wherof thee lacketh, as I trowe’ (CA, VIII, 2426-7). And like the false alchemist, old Amans wastes his time chasing his lady which given his ‘fieble astat’ (CA, VIII, 2429) constitutes nothing but fruitless labour. Of this Venus says ‘thou beginne / Thing where thou miht non ende winne’ (CA, VIII, 2429-30).

Venus’ words cause Amans/Gower’s face to become ‘pale and fade’ (CA, VIII 2448) and he tells us that ‘swoune I fell to grounde’ (CA, VIII, 2489). His non-verbal reaction, this bodily gesture, causes him to hover between two realms ‘ne fully quik ne fully ded’ (CA, VIII, 2451), not quite alive but not quite dead. He lingers in a type of stasis or, indeed, a purgatory. It is an absence and a presence; absent physically but

present mentally, with an ever expanding rift between outer and inner as Amans retreats into the internal world of the unconscious. It is this involuntary rejection of the cacophony of noise which comprises the external world that facilitates Amans/Gower to experience his 'avision' (CA, VIII, 2805). His vision, strikingly similar to that of his *Tale of Rosiphelee* in Book IV and in turn to the purgatorial themed *Lai du Trot*,⁶³³ consists of a 'parliament' of lovers in 'lusti youthe' (CA, VIII, 2461) with 'garlandes noight of o colour, / Some of the lef, some of the flour' (CA, VIII, 2467-8). They were 'al of lust' (CA, VIII, 2473) and full of the 'lust of youthes heste' (CA, VIII, 2489). Led by Pan and his music, Amans/Gower sees such famous and mythological figures as Tristram and Ysolde, Lancelot and Guinevere, Galahad and his lady, Jason and Creusa, Hercules and Helen, Theseus and Phaedra, Hector and Pantaselle, Paris and Helen, Troilus and Criseyde, Dido and Aeneas, Phyllis and Demophon, Theseus and Ariadne, Hercules and Deianira, Jason and Medea, Achilles and Deidamia, Cleopatra and Mark Antony, Pyramus and Thisbe, Procne and Philomela, Canace and Machaire, Penelope and Ulysses, Lucius Tarquinius Collatinus and Lucretia, Admetus and Alcestis, Ceix and Alcyone. 'Love' was their guide and 'Youthe' was the marshal (CA, VIII, 2660-62). It seems that all the Ovidian lovers are present in this group and nearly each character has had a tale dedicated to them earlier in the poem by Genius. But a second group come by, this time led by 'Elde' and not 'Youthe'. In this group, much smaller than the previous one, Gower writes 'The moste part were of gret age, / And that was sene in the visage' (CA, VIII, 2670-1) and opposed to 'al freissh [...] hem springe and dance' (CA, VIII, 2487) they with 'A softe pas [...] dance and trede' (CA, VIII, 2682). Amans/Gower sees

⁶³³ For a connection between Gower's *Tale of Rosiphelee*, Chaucer's *Wife of Bath*, and the *Lai du Trot* see Clare Fletcher, 'The Wife of Bath in the Saddle: A Re-reading of 'Upon an amblere esily she sat' (General Prologue, I 469), in *Occupying Space in Medieval and Early Modern Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2016), pp.3-22. For a discussion of just the *Tale of Rosiphelee* see James T. Bratcher, 'The Function of the Jeweled Bridle in Gower's "Tale of Rosiphelee"', *The Chaucer Review*, 40/1 (2005), 107-110. For early editions of the *Lai du Trot*, see L.-J.- N. Monmerqué and Francisque Michel, *Lai d'Ignaurès en vers du XIIIe siècle, par Renaut, suivi des lais de Melion et du Trot, en vers, du XIIIe siècle, publiés pour la première fois d'après deux manuscrits uniques* (Paris: Silvestre, 1832), pp.71-83; Margaret E. Grimes, 'Le Lay du Trot', *Romanic Review*, 26 (1935), 313-21; Prudence M. O'Hara Tobin, *Les Lais anonymes des XIIIe et XIIIe siècles: édition critique de quelques lais bretons*, Publications Romanes et Françaises, 143 (Geneva: Droz, 1976), pp.335-46. An excellent version and translation can be found here Glynn S. Burgess and Leslie C. Brook, eds and trans, *Three Old French Narrative Lays: Trot, Lecheor, Nabaret*, Liverpool Online Series: Critical Editions of French Texts, 1 (1999), <<http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/cultures-languages-and-areastudies/liverpoolonline/narrativelays.pdf>> [accessed September 29th 2017], 17. For a discussion of the theme of the purgatory of cruel beauties which briefly mentions the *Lai du Trot*, see Paul Battles, 'In Folly Ripe, in Reason Rotten: The Flower and the Leaf and the Purgatory of Cruel Beauties', *Medium Aevum*, 72 (2003), 238-58.

in this older group King David and Bathsheba, King Solomon, Samson and Delilah, Aristotle and Phyllis⁶³⁴, Virgil and his basket, Socrates, Plato and ‘Ovide the poete’ (CA, VIII, 2719). Gower has, uniquely in medieval literature, taken the popular medieval woman-on-top topos and used it instead to underscore and intensify the great contrast between youth and old age. Here, all the older men in the company of ‘Elde’ have been weakened or overcome, in one way or another, by love and the allure of young women. This is their great shame as Gower writes ‘I thoghte thanne how love is swete, / Which hath so wise men reclaimed, / And was myself the lasse aschamed’ (CA, VII, 2720-22). When this group reach the point where Venus stands and Amans/Gower is lying on the ground ‘These olde men with o vois alle / To Venus preiden fro my sake’ (CA, VIII, 2728-9). Recognising Amans/Gower’s plight they beseech the Queen of Love to have mercy and revive the unconscious poet. She hears their pleas and takes pity calling for Cupid to come and remove the fiery dart that Amans thought had pierced him in the Book I. With that, the narrator remarks ‘Of hem that in avision / I hadde a revelacion, / So as I tolde now tofore’ (CA, VIII, 2805-07). Venus helps Amans/Gower out of his trance and with a special ointment ‘she hath my wounded herte enoight / My temples and mi reins also’ (CA, VIII, 2818-19). She then gives him:

A wonder mirour for to holde,
 In which sche bad me to beholde
 And taken hiede of that I syhe;

⁶³⁴ Susan L. Smith writes that the visual tradition of Phyllis riding Aristotle is based on the textual tradition in *The Power of Women: A Topos in Medieval Art and Literature* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), pp.66-136. Marilyn Desmond writes that ‘more than one hundred examples of the ‘mounted Aristotle’ survive from the medieval period, and the image appears with similar frequency throughout the early modern era’ in *Ovid’s Art and the Wife of Bath: The Ethics of Erotic Violence* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006), pp.14-15, p.122. The source of the story of Phyllis and Aristotle is *Le Lai d’Aristote* originally attributed to the Norman poet Henri d’Andeli but a new hypothesis, albeit fragile, suggests the author was Henri de Valenciennes and was composed sometime in the first half of the thirteenth century - see François Zufferey, ‘Henri de Valenciennes, auteur du *Lai d’Aristote* et de la *Vie de saint Jean l’Évangéliste*’, *Revue de Linguistique Romane*, 68 (2004), pp.335-57. For an excellent translation and analysis, see Leslie C. Brook and Glynn S. Burgess, eds and trans, *Henri de Valenciennes: The Lay of Aristotle*, Liverpool Online Series: Critical Editions of French Texts, 16 (2011), <<http://www.liv.ac.uk/media/livacuk/cultures-langues-and-area-studies/liverpoolonline/Aristote.pdf>> [accessed September 29th 2017]. Bishop Jacques de Vitry incorporated this story into Exemplum 15 in his *Sermones feriales et communes*. See Jacques de Vitry, *Die exempla aus den Sermones feriales et communes des Jakob von Vitry*, Joseph Greven, ed., *Sammlung mittellateinischer Texte*, 9 (Heidelberg: Winter, 1914), 15.

Wherinne anon myn hertes yhe
I caste, and sih my colour fade,
Myn yhen dymme and al unglade,
Mi chiekes thinne, and al my face
With elde I myhte se deface,
So riveled and so wo besein
That ther was nothing full ne plein,
I syh also myn heres hore (CA, VIII, 2821-31)

But it is only through the ‘hertes yhe’ that Gower is able to finally catch a fleeting glimpse of the truth. The phrase ‘hertes yhe’ does not mean the physical eye but, according to the *MED*, means, instead, the mind⁶³⁵. Thus Gower/Amans using the mirror as merely a reminder, turns inward towards the heart/mind/soul and only then does he understand for himself what his condition is. Genius and Venus have been unable to teach him anything throughout the whole poem and it is not until he consults his own ‘inner man’, ‘interior teacher of Christ’ that he comprehends, briefly, his reality. Thus Gower/Amans finally recovers through an internal and silent action rather than any external or linguistic one. With that he ‘was out of mi swoune affraied’ (CA, VIII, 2859). Absolved of his crimes against love, Venus presents to Amans/Gower ‘A peire of bedes blak as sable / Sche tok and heng my necke aboute; / Upon the gaudes al withoute / Was write of gold *Por reposer*’ (CA, VIII, 2904-07). The Middle English ‘bede’ is derived from the Old English ‘gebed’⁶³⁶ which means ‘prayer’.⁶³⁷ The Anglo-Norman phrase ‘por reposer’ means for rest, for stillness.⁶³⁸ Gower uses several forms of ‘repose’ in his *Mirour de l’Omme* and always as a contrast to action, labour, or other worldly strifes such as wars or tempests. One specific use is of particular importance, he writes:

⁶³⁵ *MED*, ‘herte’ n. (2) (a).

⁶³⁶ *MED*, ‘bede’ n.

⁶³⁷ *Bosworth-Toller Anglo-Saxon Dictionary*, ‘gebed’ n., <<http://bosworth.ff.cuni.cz/013597>> [accessed September 29th 2017].

⁶³⁸ *AND*, ‘reposer’ v.

Mais d'autre voie manifeste
Son sacrilege, qui la feste
Des saintz ne quart q'est dediez
Ainçois labour, don't il adqueste
Proufit et gaign du bien terrestre
Es jours qui sont saintefiez
A dieu et privilegiez
Sicomme tesmoigne ly decrez
La bible auci de vielle gest
Que rien soit vendu n'achatez
Defent es festes celebrez
Ainz en *repos* soit homme et beste (MO, 7201-12)⁶³⁹

[But one who shows sacrilege in another way is the man who keeps not the feast dedicated to the saints but instead labours on the days set apart and sanctified to God, in accordance with the law, so that he can acquire profit and gain of earthly wealth. The Bible also, in an ancient story, forbids that anything be sold or bought on feast days; man and beast ought rather to be at rest]

This use of 'repose' here is suggestive of the idea of biblical rest as ordained for the Sabbath. We find a parallel in St Paul's Epistle to the Hebrews:

itaque relinquitur sabbatismus populo Dei qui enim ingressus est in requiem eius etiam ipse requievit ab operibus suis sicut a suis Deus

⁶³⁹ Emphasis my own.

festinemus ergo ingredi in illam requiem ut ne in id ipsum quis incidat incredulitatis exemplum vivus est enim Dei sermo et efficax et penetrabilior omni gladio ancipiti et pertingens usque ad divisionem animae ac spiritus compagum quoque et medullarum et discretor cogitationum et intentionum cordis et non est ulla creatura invisibilis in conspectu eius omnia autem nuda et aperta sunt oculis eius ad quem nobis sermo habentes ergo pontificem magnum qui penetraverit caelos Iesum Filium Dei teneamus confessionem non enim habemus pontificem qui non possit conpati infirmitatibus nostris temptatum autem per omnia pro similitudine absque peccato adeamus ergo cum fiducia ad thronum gratiae ut misericordiam consequamur et gratiam inveniamus in auxilio oportuno (Hebrews 4:9-16)

[There remaineth therefore a day of rest for the people of God. For he that is entered into his rest, the same also hath rested from his works, as God did from his. Let us hasten therefore to enter into that rest: lest any man fall into the same example of unbelief. For the word of God is living and effectual and more piercing than any two edged sword; and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints also and the marrow: and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature invisible in his sight: but all things are naked and open to his eyes, to whom our speech is. Having therefore a great high priest that hath passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God: let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities: but one tempted in all things like as we are, without sin. Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace: that we may obtain mercy and find grace in seasonable aid.]

Resting on the Sabbath is a ceasing of all things worldly, physical, temporal, a symbolic casting off of the external distractions and vices in order to dedicate the mind to spiritual nourishment. It is done in preparation for and as a reminder of the final heavenly ‘repose’.

It is a time reserved for prayer. And after Venus gives Amans/Gower his paire of beads she entreats him to ‘preie hierafter for the pes’ (CA, VIII, 2913).

The practice of prayer, *in parvo*, constitutes this same casting off of external distractions as the ‘repose’ on feast days or the Sabbath are meant to. Gower writes in his *Mirour* of humility, devotion, and holy prayer and the initial need for privacy away from the noise of the outside world:

Devocioun la primereine,
Quelle en secrésimple et souleine
Y vient, qant voet son dieu prier
Ensi nous fist dieus enseigner
Q’au temps que nous devons orer
N’ert chambrelein ne chambreleine,
Ainçois devons les huiss fermer
Pour noz prieres affermer;
Car dieus ascoulte au tiel enseine (MO, 10180-10188)

[The first is named Devotion, who comes secretly, simple and alone, when she wants to pray to her God. God taught us that when we would pray, there should be no chamberlain or maidservant with us; rather, we should close the door in order to strengthen our prayers, for God hearkens to such a prayer.]

The necessity for a quiet, tranquil environment for prayer is to allow for a retreat into the interior world of the heart/mind/soul. Indeed, Gower remarks that words are not essential to prayer as it is the inner non-verbal speech that is in dialogue with God during such times of devotion:

Mais en priant outre trestout
Il falt quie l'omme en soit devout,
Car meulx valt prier sanz parole
A celluy qui son cuer y bout,
Qe vainement a parler moult
Sanz bien penser, du lange sole:
Car sainte lange ove penséfole
Ne valt ja plus que la frivole,
Que sanz merite dieus debout;
Sicomme l'en fait de la citole
Don't en discord la note vole
Et grieve a celluy qui l'esoult. (MO, 10381-10393)

[But above all, in praying, one must be devout. It is better to pray without a word if one puts his heart into it, than vacuously to speak a great deal with only the tongue and no thought. For a holy tongue with foolish thought is worth no more than a trifle, which God rejects without merit, just as a discordant note of the lyre flies off and wounds the ear of the hearer.]

Gower re-iterates this crucial idea that praying is an internal process, an inward movement of the heart rather than an external experience and underscores the need to be in 'repose', that is to say removed from the vain diversions of the temporal world:

Isidre, q'estoit clerc parfait

Dist que priere est lors bien fait,
Qant om ne pense point aillours;
Mais qant ly pensiers se retrait,
Du quoy ly cuer au siècle vait,
Qanque l'en prie est a rebours
Seint Augustin ly grans doctors
Dist que priere des criours
Ove cuer muët, est inparfait,
Qant bouch et cuer sont descordours:
Combien q'om prie as grans clamours,
N'est resound qu'il marite en ait. (MO, 10405-10416)

[Isidore, the perfect cleric, says that a prayer is well done when the man is not thinking of anything else. But if the thought draws back, so that the heart goes back into worldly things, then whatever one prays for is reversed. Saint Augustine, the great teacher, says that the prayer of a speaker with a mute heart is imperfect. When mouth and heart are in discord, it is not reasonable that there be merit, however great the clamour one makes in praying.]

Gower tells us that prayer without this inner movement of the heart, without an internal consultation with God, is utterly worthless and he provides a perfect analogy from his diplomatic experience to explain fully what he means:

Auci resemble au messenger
Q'om fait sanz lettres envoier
Et sanz enseignes pur aler

Devers estrange regioun

Au sire que l'en voet prier:

Ove vuide main le fist mander,

Dont vuid revert a sa maisoun. (MO, 10422-10428)

[It is also like a messenger sent without letters and without object to the lord of a foreign region, from whom one wants to request something. With empty hand he was sent forth, so that empty he returns to his house.]

Praying, for Gower, is a type of theological diplomacy. It is a non-verbal communication between two parties that takes place entirely in the internal realm of the heart/mind/soul. It is a consultation with Divine Truth, the interior teacher of Christ, the inner spring. The concept is entirely Augustinian and, as we have seen, Gower refers to him by name in the passage above. Augustine writes, with extreme similarity, of the process of prayer in the opening book of *De magistro*. Adeotatus is concerned and, indeed, cautious about accepting the thesis that all speaking is teaching on the grounds that he should not be able to 'teach' God anything during prayer. Augustine responds:

Nescire te arbitror non ob aliud nobis praeceptum esse ut in clausis cubiculis oremus, quo nomine significantur mentis penetralia, nisi quod Deus, ut nobis quod cupimus praestet, commemorari aut doceri nostra locutione non quaerit. Qui enim loquitur, suae voluntatis signum foras dat per articulatum sonum: Deus autem in ipsis rationalis animae secretis, qui homo interior vocatur, et quaerendus et deprecandus est; haec enim sua templa esse voluit. An apud Apostolum non legisti: *Nescitis quia templum Dei estis, et spiritus Dei habitat in vobis*, et: *In interiore homine habitare Christum?* Nec in propheta animadvertisti: *Dicite in cordibus vestris, et in cubilibus vestris compungimini: sacrificate sacrificium iustitiae, et sperate in Domino?* Ubi putas sacrificium iustitiae sacrificari, nisi in templo mentis, et in cubilibus cordis? Ubi autem sacrificandum est, ibi et

orandum. Quare non opus est locutione cum oramus, id est sonantibus verbis, nisi forte, sicut sacerdotes faciunt, significandae mentis suae causa, non ut Deus, sed ut homines audiant, et consensione quadam per commemorationem suspendantur in Deum: an tu aliud existimas? (I. 2)

[You do not realize, I think, that the command to pray in the secrecy of our chamber - a term signifying the innermost recesses of the soul - was given only for this reason, that God does not need to be reminded or taught by us in order to give us what we desire. When a person speaks, he gives an outward sign of what he wants by means of an articulated sound. But we must seek and pray to God in the innermost court of the rational soul which is called the “interior man,” for it is here that He has wished to make His temple. And have you not read in the Apostle: “Know you not that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you,” and that “Christ dwells in the inner man”? And have you not noted the words of the Prophet: “Speak in your hearts and repent in your chambers; offer the sacrifice of justice and hope in the Lord”? Where do you think the “sacrifice of justice” is to be offered, if not in the “temple” of the soul and in the “chambers” of the heart? Now we have to offer sacrifice there where we are to pray. Hence there is no need, when we pray, for language, that is, for the spoken word, except, perhaps, to express one’s thoughts, the way priests do, not so God may hear, but in order that men may hear and, by this verbal reminder, fix their thoughts upon God by a unity of heart and mind.]⁶⁴⁰

For Augustine, and in turn Gower, verbal signs during prayer are not required and if used only serve as reminders to turn inwards toward the heart.⁶⁴¹ In this way Venus’ ‘peire of

⁶⁴⁰ St Augustine, *The Teacher, The Free Choice of Will, Grace and Free Will*, trans. Robert P. Russell (Washington D.C: The Catholic University Press of America, 1968, repr. 2004).

⁶⁴¹ When Nebuchadnezzar prays to God for forgiveness in Book I, Gower writes similarly of a non-verbal interaction:

He wepte and with ful woful teres

Up to the hevene he caste his chiere

bedes blak' (CA, VIII, 2904) offer a perfect analogy for the usefulness of words during prayer. Both are external objects that contain no inherent truth in and of themselves, but merely act as aids to contemplation, as a guide, a reminder to turn inward toward the spiritual realm.

With that Gower the poet dispenses completely with the narrative fiction and in all three recensions Gower ends this fictional part with a prayer to Christ, the Divine logos, the perfect signifier and signified, the source of all true language 'Parce precor, Criste, populous quo gaudeat iste' [Spare I pray, O Christ, the people in order that they may rejoice] (CA, VIII, iv); 'Ad laudem Cristi, quem tu, virgo, peperisti' [For the praise of Christ which you, O Virgin, gave birth to] (CA, VIII, iv*). At the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer writes that Troilus laughs at the wo 'Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste, / And dampned al oure werk that foloweth so / The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste / And sholden al oure herte on heven caste' (V, 1822-1825). This recalls Augustine's self-contempt at his weeping for the fictional death of Dido in his *Confessiones* (1.13.21). Chaucer's Troilus, as he ascends into the eighth sphere and is released from bodily desires, can now see the folly and worldly distraction of pagan fictions and fables just as Augustine did. They are of no use to the pursuit of spiritual happiness. Instead of lust, his mind should have always been on lore. Chaucer re-iterates the sentiment several lines later 'Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte / And of youre herte up casteth the visage / To thilke God that after his ymage' (TC, 1837-39).

Gower too, in the final lines of the *Confessio* rejects outright the worldly vanities of lusty poetic fiction 'And thus forthy my final leve / I take now for evere more / Withoute makynge any more / Of love and of his dedly hele' (CA, VIII, 3152-55). Gower gives up his verses of love and returns 'ther vertu moral duelleth' (CA, VIII, 2925).

Wepende, and thoghte in this manere;
Thogh he no wordes myhte winne,
Thus seide his herte and spak withinne:
'O mihti Godd, that al hast wroght
And al myht bringe agein to noght,
Now knowe I wel, bot al of Thee,
This world hath no prosperité [...] (CA, I, 3000-3008)

Despite appealing to Christ, the Logos through prayer, Gower once again returns to the anxieties of the ambiguities of language in his final Latin lines:

Explicit ist liber, qui transeat, obsecro liber
Ut sine liuore vigeat lectoris in ore
Qui sedet in scannis celi det ut ista Johannis
Perpetuis annis stet pagina grata Britannis.
Derbeie Comiti, recolunt quem laude periti,
Vade liber purus, sub eo requiesce futurus. (CA, VIII)

[Here ends this book, and may it, I implore, travel free so that without a bruise it may thrive in the reader's ear. May He who sits in the throne of heaven grant that this page of John remain for all time pleasing to the Britains. Go, spotless book, to the Count of Derby, whom the learned honour with praise, and take repose when you will be in his keeping]

The ambiguity and uncertainty of interpretation that weighed so heavily on the text in the opening Latin epigram remains just as potent here at the denouement. Indeed, nothing has been resolved and the poem finishes, therefore, with an acknowledgement that there is no guarantee of meaning. Verbal and textual signs are as inadequate at signifying truth as they were when the poem began. The poem ultimately comes full circle, with beginning and end fused inextricably through the discomfort of linguistic equivocity which, Gower has demonstrated time and time again throughout the *Confessio*, is the ineluctable condition of man in a post-lapsarian, post-Babel world.

To conclude, I want to return to the lengthy explication of Daniel's explanation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream to the Babylonian King in the Prologue. In it Gower continues past the dream to describe the great divisions of the world throughout history. He writes firstly of 'werre' (CA, Prologue, 1000) between 'bodi and the soule' (CA, Prologue, 995) that 'ferst began in Paradis' (CA, Prologue, 1005) and how 'thilke werre

tho forth broghte / The vice of alle dedly sinne' (CA, Prologue, 1009-10). After his description of the Fall, Gower writes of a second punishment. This time of how 'God the grete flodes sende, / Of al the world and made an ende / Bot Noë with his felaschipe / Which only weren saulf be ship.' (CA, Prologue, 1013-16). After Noah's survival comes a third linguistic punishment of the world after 'Nembrot such emprise nom / Whan he the Tour Babel on heihte' (CA, Prologue, 1018-19). Gower then moves on to the final punishment of the world, the end of days and last judgement. He writes that

And tokne whan the world schal faile
For so seith Crist withoute faile,
That nyh upon the worldes ende
Pes and accord away schol wende
And alle charité schal cesse
Among the men, and hate encresce;
And whan these toknes ben befalle,
Al sodeinly the ston schal falle,
As Daniel it hath beknowe,
Which al this world schal overthrowe
And every man schal thanne arise
To joie or elles to juise,
Wher that he schal for evere dwelle,
Or straght to hevene or straght to helle (CA, Prologue, 1031-1044)

This is the ultimate fulfilment of Daniel's prophecy, when the age of empires, the *translatio imperii* and *translatio studii*, finally comes to an end, to its final decay, then God will destroy the earth as symbolized by the giant stone that falls. Gower has laid out an inevitable and inescapable continuing cycle of degeneration of the world from the

beginning of time in Paradise, through his present day, to the Judgement day at the opposite end. St Augustine writes of Judgement day in Book XX of his *De civitate Dei* interpreting Daniel's prophecy to mean a universal conflagration matching the great flood that will renew the world into a New Heaven and a New Earth:

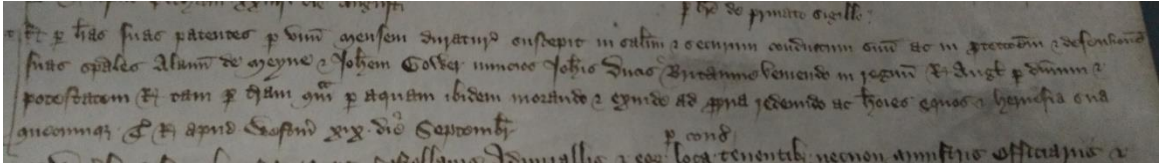
tunc figura huius mundi mundanorum ignium conflagratione praeteribit, sicut factum est mundanarum aquarum inundatione diluvium. Illa itaque, ut dixi, conflagratione mundana elementorum corruptibilium qualitates, quae corporibus nostris corruptibilibus congruebant, ardendo penitus interibunt, atque ipsa substantia eas qualitates habebit, quae corporibus immortalibus mirabili mutatione convenient (De civitate Dei, XX, xvi)

[then shall the figure of this world pass away in a conflagration of universal fire, as once before the world was flooded with a deluge of universal water. And by this universal conflagration the qualities of the corruptible elements which suited our corruptible bodies shall utterly perish, and our substance shall receive such qualities as shall, by a wonderful transmutation, harmonize with our immortal bodies, so that, as the world itself is renewed to some better thing, it is fitly accommodated to men, themselves renewed in their flesh to some better thing.]

At Judgement Day, the righteous will cast off all temporal vanities and as souls will rise up to the City of God and those that have not repented will, as Gower writes, go 'straght to helle'(CA, Prologue, 1044). As Augustine points out in his *Confessions* 9.10.25, the eternal Word is internal and there will be no need for language or external signs in the City of God. Souls will finally be free of the multitude of words that have distracted them in their earthly bodies. Complete comprehension will be restored as it was in the beginning of time. I contend therefore, that Gower's model of unity is not Arion as so often promulgated, but, in fact, Constance. Constance, as we have seen in this chapter, symbolizes a *translatio imperii* without conquest, a *translatio studii* without decay. It is her participation in the formation of a worldwide Christian *communitas*, a community of

the soul that offers an antidote to the linguistic and divisive consequences of Babel. It is an inner, spiritual diplomacy that Constance represents, and one that Gower advocates. It is a diplomacy not reliant on the mutable word and unstable external sign but inner grace. It is a community that shares an internal bond of sacred and eternal truth in preparation for a new life together at the end of time. It transcends all external things. Augustine writes: ‘pax caelestis civitatis ordinatissima et concordissima societas fruendi Deo et invicem in Deo’ [The peace of the celestial city is the perfectly ordered and harmonious enjoyment of God, and of one another in God] (19.13). This is the vision of Augustine’s City of God, where souls live in harmony in a shared and unified desire of wills.

APPENDIX A



Chancery: Treaty Rolls C76, Richard II 1381. By kind permission of The National Archives

TRANSCRIPTION

[Margin: [Salvus] Conductus] [Rex] p[er] li[ter]as suas patentes p[er] unu[m] mensem duratur[a]s suscepit in salvu[m] et securum conductum suu[m] ac in p[ro]tectione[m] et defensione[m] suas sp[eci]ales Alan[um] de Meyne et Joh[ann]em Gower nuncios Joh[ann]is Duc[i]s Brittanie veniendo in regnu[m] [Regis] Angl[ie] p[er] d[om]inium potestatem [Regis] tam per t[er]ram q[ua]m per aquam ibidem morando et exinde ad p[ro]pria redeundo ac h[om]in[es] eq[ui] et h[er]nesia sua quaecumq[ue] [Teste Rege] apud Westm[onasterium] XIX die September.

TRANSLATION

[Margin: Safe Conduct] The King by his letters patent which shall last for one month takes under his special protection and defence the safe and secure conduct of Alan de Meyne and John Gower messengers of John the Duke of Brittany to enter the realm of England by the power of the King both by land or by water to stay and return home with all their men, horses, and equipment Witnessed by the King at Westminster 19th September.

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