

Narrative and moral consequence in London poetry,

1375-1400

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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## Abstract

Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe, the three first English poets to take up the conventions of *dits amoureux*, also composed religious *pastoralia* – unlike any fourteenth-century composer of *dits amoureux* on the continent. This has not been addressed by scholars due to a hesitation to approach these poets as religious writers and a lack of synthesis between approaches informed by French poetry and by ecclesiastical writing. It is significant because *dits amoureux* and *pastoralia* make contradictory demands regarding narrative and moral consequence. Narrative in *dits amoureux* is a study in distortion; *dits amoureux* carefully frame narrative, so that any moral consequence of this exploration is arrested. *Pastoralia* present existence as a narrative space heading to its ending in the last judgement, and base their moral imperative on consequence.

Clanvowe died before resolving the implications of this. For most of his career, Gower attempted to develop a mode of moral poetry grounded in satire and *pastoralia*, using the conventions of *dits amoureux* as a foil; where he combined these traditions, Chaucer carefully separated poetry and religious writing. In the late 1380s, however, Chaucer and Gower's work converged in the *Confessio amantis* and the *Canterbury Tales*. These poems employ the framing techniques of *dits amoureux* to create a form of moral play. Despite this reconciliation, Chaucer and Gower situate moral play differently in relation to their other works: Gower integrates the *Confessio* with a repertoire that includes his satirical and devotional writings, while Chaucer presents the relationship between poetry and morality as a problem to which no lasting resolution is available.

Much critical work in the recent 'religious turn' tends to pursue 'a reading' of these poets' work in relation to their religiosity; this thesis suggests that their poetry might emerge through or despite their religiosity, in a process of creative tension.

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## Abbreviations

- BC* – John Clanvowe, *The Boke of Cupide*, in *The Works of Sir John Clanvowe*, ed. by V. J. Scattergood (Cambridge: Brewer, 1975), pp. 33-53.
- CA* – John Gower, *Confessio amantis*, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), II-III (1901), II. 1-III. 480.
- CT* – Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. by F. N. Robinson, rev. by Ralph Hanna and Larry D. Benson, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 23-329.
- LGW* – Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Legend of Good Women*, ed. by A. S. G. Edwards and M. C. E. Shaner, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 587-630.
- MO* – John Gower, *Mirour de l'omme*, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), I (1899), 1-334.
- RR* – Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. by Félix Lecoy, 3 vols (Paris: Champion, 1965-70).
- Troilus* – Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. by Stephen A. Barney, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 471-586.
- TW* – John Clanvowe, *The Two Ways*, in *The Works of Sir John Clanvowe*, ed. by V. J. Scattergood (Cambridge: Brewer, 1975), pp. 57-80.
- VC* – John Gower, *Vox clamantis*, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), IV (1902), 1-313.

Bible quotations are taken from *Biblia sacra iuxta vulgata versionem*, ed. by Robert Weber and Roger Gryson, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2007).

The punctuation of edited texts reproduces the conventions employed in the edition. Abbreviations in early printed editions are expanded in italics.

All translations from Latin, French, and Italian are my own.

## Introduction

Among experts, it has become general knowledge that the most widely circulated Middle English poem was the *Prick of Conscience*, followed by the *Canterbury Tales*.<sup>1</sup> This observation is frequently employed to jolt an audience out of their complacent tendency to centre Chaucer in discussions of late medieval English literary culture, on the understanding that a verse treatise on the wretchedness of the world, death, Purgatory, and damnation (along with the joys of salvation) stands in startling contrast to Chaucer's story collection. This contrast only works because scholars have consistently overlooked one aspect of late fourteenth-century literary culture – no one has ever examined the fact that each member of the first generation of English poets to take up the francophone conventions of the *dits amoureux*, in pursuit of a mode of secular poetry, also composed religious *pastoralia*, unlike any fourteenth-century composer of *dits amoureux* on the continent.<sup>2</sup> Chaucer (d. 1400) was closely indebted to the *dits amoureux* in his dream visions, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the *Canterbury Tales*, but ended the *Tales* with the Parson's Tale, a penitential treatise. Gower (d. 1408) employed the conventions of the *dits amoureux* in the *Confessio amantis*, pairing it with material on the sins from *pastoralia*, but he also composed the *Mirour de l'omme*, a poem which directly instructs its audience on self-examination and penitence. Only two works by Clanvowe (d. 1391) survive, the *Book of Cupid*, which closely follows the conventions of the *dit amoureux*, and the *Two Ways*, a treatise advocating obedience to

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<sup>1</sup> For an outline of the manuscript traditions, see Robert E. Lewis and Angus McIntosh, *A Descriptive Guide to the Manuscripts of the Prick of Conscience*, *Medium Ævum Monographs, New Series 12* (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 1982); and *CT*, Introduction to Textual Notes.

<sup>2</sup> Note that this does not include writers who adapted the conventions of the *Roman de la rose* and the *dits amoureux* in religious poetry, such as Guillaume de Deguileville, William Langland, and the *Pearl* Poet.



God's commandments. The composition of both poetry indebted to *dits amoureux* and *pastoralia* by a single writer poses a problem, because these two traditions respond in conflicting ways to moral consequence. *Pastoralia* emerged as part of an ecclesiastical movement to ensure that all members of the Church took account of the coming prospect of the Last Judgement in their ordinary lives through participation in the sacraments and moral action, in accordance with the single great narrative of salvation history. Contrastingly, *dits amoureux* narrate a series of events which are separated from the moral demands of any larger narrative by a device which this thesis will call the narrative frame. Clanvowe died having only outlined this conflict, but Chaucer and Gower attended to it throughout their careers. When Chaucer and Gower respectively came to compose the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio amantis*, they altered the narrative frame and the mode of poetic play it facilitated. Like the *dits amoureux*, these poems protect their narrative space from moral consequence, but they invite their audience to a mode of moral speculation, a poetic play with new moral horizons.

This thesis uses the term *dit amoureux* to refer to a francophone mode of narrative poetry on the topic of love which formed the basis of Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe's poetics, and with which they consistently aligned themselves. This pragmatic definition encapsulates a set of narrative poems with similar practices, which were of immediate influence on Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe's poetry; scholars have attempted to define more precisely the wider genus *dit*, to which *dit amoureux* is a species, and this has often posed challenging and provocative results, but the term is very capacious and doing so raises difficulties which are not immediately relevant to this thesis' central investigation.<sup>3</sup> Long-established scholarship, from source studies to

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<sup>3</sup> See the overview in Anthime Fourier, Introduction to Jean Froissart, *Dits et débats* ed. by Anthime Fourier, Textes littéraires français, 274 (Geneva: Droz, 1979), pp. 7-90 (pp. 12-14), along with the more optimistic Michel Zink, 'Dit', in *Dictionnaire des lettres françaises: le moyen âge*, ed. by Robert Bossuat et al., 2<sup>nd</sup> edn (Paris: Fayard, 1992), p. 38. The most important recent discussion is A. C. Spearing, *Medieval*

critical works which attend to poetic currents across the English Channel, has attended to Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe's debt to Guillaume de Machaut's *Jugement du roy de Bohème*, *Jugement du roy de Navarre*, *Dit de la fontaine amoureuse*, *Remède de fortune*, and *Livre du voir dit*, and Jean Froissart's *Paradis d'amour*, *Dit du bleu chevalier*, *Espinette amoureuse*, *Prison amoureuse*, and *Joli buisson de jeunesse*.<sup>4</sup>

These works are widely referred to as *dits amoureux*, and they foreground a shared poetic heritage in their reception of Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun's *Roman de*

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*Autographies: The 'I' of the Text* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), pp. 33-64, which builds on both A. C. Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity: The Encoding of Subjectivity in Medieval Narratives and Lyrics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) and Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, 'Le Clerc et l'écriture: le *Voir dit* de Guillaume de Machaut et la définition du *dit*', in *Literatur in der Gesellschaft des Spätmittelalters*, ed. by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (Heidelberg: Winter, 1980), pp. 151-68. A slightly different attempt to outline the parameters of a *dit* can be found in Didier Lechat, '<<Dire par fiction>>: Métamorphoses du je chez Guillaume de Machaut, Jean Froissart et Christine de Pizan' (Paris: Champion, 2005), pp. 11-12; an adjacent but slightly different set of poetic practices are grouped together in Stephanie A. Vierick Gibbs Kamath, *Authorship and First-Person Allegory in Late Medieval France and England*, Gallica, 26 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Chaucer's recourse to these works as sources is succinctly detailed in Barry A. Windeatt, Preface to *Chaucer's Dream Poetry: Sources and Analogues*, ed. and trans. by Barry A. Windeatt, *Chaucer Studies*, 7 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1982), pp. ix-xvii. The classic studies regarding Chaucer and these French poets are Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1957).; James I. Wimsatt, *Chaucer and the French Love Poets: The Literary Background of The Book of the Duchess* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1968); and James I. Wimsatt, *Chaucer and his Contemporaries: Natural Music in the Fourteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); they have a recent counterpart in Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years' War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). For Gower, see the important Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics in Gower's Confessio amantis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 9-30, as well as R. F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion*, *Publications of the John Gower Society*, 2 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), and J. A. Burrow, 'The Portrayal of Amans in *Confessio amantis*', in *Gower's Confessio amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. by Alastair J. Minnis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983), pp. 5-24. For Clanvowe, see V. J. Scattergood, Introduction to *The Works of Sir John Clanvowe*, ed. by V. J. Scattergood (Cambridge: Brewer, 1975), pp. 9-32, and Lee Patterson, 'Court Politics and the Invention of Literature: The Case of Sir John Clanvowe', in *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. by David Aers (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 7-41.

*la rose*, itself a prevailing influence in Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe's work.<sup>5</sup> Further to this, significant studies have argued that the major works of these English poets should themselves be considered *dits amoureux*. John Burrow made a cogent case for the identification of Chaucer and Gower's most celebrated works, the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio amantis*, as *dits*.<sup>6</sup> His argument is somewhat impaired by a lack of distinction between *dits* and *dits amoureux*, and an undue centralisation of the Chaucerian dream vision as an independent poetic tradition which can be compared to francophone *dits*, where it would be more straightforward to suggest that all of Chaucer's poetic works, from the dream visions to the *Tales*, are *dits*. Nonetheless, Burrow makes a strong case for Chaucer and Gower's fully developed work being an extension of this francophone tradition. Likewise, Anthony Spearing's analysis of the *dit* as a literary mode quietly admits that Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe's work should be understood to embody and further develop a set of poetic practices that has already been formulated in the work of Machaut and Froissart.<sup>7</sup>

The *dits amoureux* circulated among an international coterie, to which Chaucer and Clanvowe were personally connected. Froissart (d. c. 1405) was acquainted with Richard Sturry (d. 1395) from his position as a clerk of chamber to Queen Philippa of Hainault between 1361 and 1367.<sup>8</sup> Sturry's name is found with William Neville (d.

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<sup>5</sup> The foremost study of the relationship between the *Rose* and *dits amoureux* is Sylvia Huot, *The Romance of the Rose and its Medieval Readers: Interpretation, Reception, Manuscript Transmission* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); special attention to the *Rose*'s influence on poetry in England can be found in Philip Knox, 'The Romance of the Rose in Fourteenth-Century England' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2015).

<sup>6</sup> See J. A. Burrow, 'Gower's *Confessio amantis* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as *dits*', in *Readings in Medieval Textuality: Essays in Honour of A. C. Spearing*, ed. by Cristina Maria Cervone and D. Vance Smith (Cambridge: Brewer, 2016), pp. 157-68.

<sup>7</sup> See Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity*, and Spearing, *Medieval Autographies*.

<sup>8</sup> See Jean Froissart, *Œuvres de Froissart: Chroniques*, ed. by Joseph Kervyn de Lettenhove, 25 vols (Brussels: Devaux, 1867-77), XV (1872), 157 and 167; for the chronology of Froissart's activity in the 1360s see Fourier, Introduction to Froissart, *Dits et débats*.

1391), Lewis Clifford (d. 1404), Thomas Latimer (d. 1401), John Montagu (d. 1400), and John Clanvowe (d. 1391) in a list of prominent Wycliffites provided by Thomas Walsingham (d. c. 1422), and these figures prove to be closely associated in the documentary record.<sup>9</sup> Connections are evident between Chaucer and four members of this group: Sturry, Clanvowe, Neville, and Clifford.<sup>10</sup> Froissart identifies Chaucer and Sturry as members of an embassy to the French at Montreuil-sur-Mer in 1377, and their names both appear on a commission to repair walls and ditches in Greenwich and Woolwich in 1390.<sup>11</sup> Clanvowe and Chaucer are likely to have been familiar with one another's poetry: the *Book of Cupid* shares its opening lines with Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, ll. 1785-86, with the direction of adaptation never convincingly proved, although John Bowers, Lee Patterson, and Edgar Laird all assume that Chaucer is their originator.<sup>12</sup> Clanvowe and Neville were both witnesses to Chaucer's release by Cecily Champain in 1380 from charges including *raptus*.<sup>13</sup> Clifford is designated as the

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<sup>9</sup> Thomas Walsingham, *Historia anglicana*, ed. by Henry Thomas Riley, 2 vols (London: Longman, 1863-64), II (1864), 159 with a second, abbreviated list on 216. The classic study of this group remains the lecture series in K. B. McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972). pp. 136-226.

<sup>10</sup> See McFarlane, pp. 180-83.

<sup>11</sup> For Montreuil-sur-Mer see Froissart, *Chroniques*, VIII (1869), 383-86, alongside Froissart, 'J. Froissart's Story of Negotiations at Montreuil-sur-Mer', in *Chaucer Life-Records*, ed. by Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 49-51; for Greenwich and Woolwich, see 'Commission, 12 March 1390', in *Chaucer Life-Records*, ed. by Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 490-91.

<sup>12</sup> See John M. Bowers, 'Three Readings of *The Knight's Tale*: Sir John Clanvowe, Geoffrey Chaucer, and James I of Scotland', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 34. 2 (2004), 279-307; Patterson, 'Court Politics'; and Edgar Laird, 'Chaucer, Clanvowe, and Cupid', *Chaucer Review*, 44. 3 (2010), 344-50. The last speculates that Chaucer's revisions to the *Legend of Good Women* prologue were shaped by the *Book of Cupid* but maintains that the *Book* itself responded to Chaucer's work. The possibility that Thomas Clanvowe composed the *Book* and not John is convincingly dispelled in V. J. Scattergood, 'The Authorship of *The Boke of Cupide*', *Anglia*, 82. 2 (1964), 137-49.

<sup>13</sup> See 'Enrolment in Chancery of a Release of 1 May 1380', in *Chaucer Life-Records*, ed. by Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 343, with the further memorandum in the *coram rege* rolls detailed in Christopher Cannon, 'Raptus in the Chaumpaigne Release and a Newly Discovered Document Concerning the Life of Geoffrey Chaucer', *Speculum*, 68. 1 (1993), 74-94. For the meaning of the charges see Henry Ansgar Kelly, 'Meanings and Uses of Raptus in Chaucer's Time',

deliverer of Eustache Deschamps' *ballade* 285 ('Grant translateur, noble Geffroy Chaucier') to Chaucer.<sup>14</sup> Beyond this, Chaucer translated the *Roman de la rose*, whether some or all of this translation is preserved as the 'A' section of the surviving Middle English translation or not, while Sturry owned the copy of the *Rose* in London, British Library, MS Royal 19 B XIII.<sup>15</sup>

Machaut (d. 1377) was a generation older than the members of this circle, but his work would have been prominent in the world around them. Machaut composed the *Dit de la fontaine amoureuse* for Jean, duc de Berry, on his departure to the English court as a hostage in 1360, where he would remain until 1369; in this decade Chaucer joined the household of Edward III and Sturry was a knight of the King's Chamber.<sup>16</sup> The *Jugement du roi de Navarre* and *Confort d'ami* were dedicated to Charles II of Navarre, to whom Chaucer went on embassy in 1366.<sup>17</sup> It is also worth considering the Savoyard knight Oton de Granson (d. 1397) in relation to this network. Granson is the only contemporary francophone poet whom Chaucer names in his work; Granson was also acquainted with Deschamps, whose *ballade* 893 recounts their altercation with two

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*Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 20 (1998), 101-65, and Christopher Cannon, 'Chaucer and Rape: Uncertainty's Certainties', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 22 (2000), 67-92. For the close relationship between Clanvowe and Neville, see Siegrid Düll, Maurice Keen, and Anthony Luttrell, 'Faithful unto Death: The Tomb Slab of Sir William Neville and Sir John Clanvowe, Constantinople, 1391', *Antiquaries Journal*, 71 (1991), 174-90.

<sup>14</sup> Eustache Deschamps, 'Ballade 285', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by A. H. E de Queux de Saint-Hilaire and G. Raynaud, 11 vols (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1878-1903), II (1880), 138-40. Note that Chaucer addressed his *ballade* 'Truth' to Clifford's son in law, Philip de la Vache (d. 1408); see Geoffrey Chaucer, 'Truth', ed. by R. T. Lenaghan, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 653.

<sup>15</sup> See *The Romaunt of the Rose*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 685-767, and Knox, 'Rose in England', pp. 57-58.

<sup>16</sup> See 'Order, shortly before 28 November 1368, for a Warrant to the Clerk of the Great Wardrobe', in *Chaucer Life-Records*, ed. by Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), pp. 94-97, and McFarlane, pp. 164-71.

<sup>17</sup> See 'Safe-Conduct, from 22 February to 24 May 1366', in *Chaucer Life-Records*, ed. by Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 64.

English soldiers in Calais.<sup>18</sup> Granson's surviving poetry is mostly lyrical, but his *Livre messire Ode* and *Songe saint Valentin* are narrative works with generic similarities to Machaut and Froissart's *dits amoureux*. Gower's separation from this cross-Channel network is remarkable given the debt to the same *dits amoureux* evident in his poetry. Chaucer is the only member of the group with whom he has any documented association, and their relationship seems to have been relatively close. Chaucer granted Gower power of attorney when he travelled to Italy in 1378, dedicated *Troilus and Criseyde* to him (*Troilus*, 5. 1856), and alluded to his *Confessio amantis* in the Man of Law's prologue (*CT*, II. 77-89), while Gower closed the first version of his ending to the *Confessio* with an invitation to Chaucer to compose a matching testament of love (*CA*, 8. 2941\*-57\*).<sup>19</sup> This stands in the context of Martha Carlin's recent conclusion that Gower's life is relatively well documented, but with a record that shows remarkably few persistent personal associations or connections to prominent political figures.<sup>20</sup> On the whole, the *dits amoureux* were composed by members of a small cross-Channel group who were mutually acquainted, and it is worth taking the

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<sup>18</sup> See Geoffrey Chaucer, 'The Complaint of Venus', ed. by R. T. Lenaghan, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 648-49, a poem largely adapted from a series of *ballades* by Granson – see Joan Grenier-Winther, Introduction to Oton de Granson, *Poésies*, ed. by Joan Grenier-Winther, Les Classiques français du moyen âge, 162 (Paris: Champion, 2010), pp. 9-121 (pp. 103-07); Eustache Deschamps, 'Ballade 893', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by A. H. E de Queux de Saint-Hilaire and G. Raynaud, 11 vols (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 1878-1903), V (1887), 79-80.

<sup>19</sup> See 'King's Letters of General Attorney, 21 May 1378', in *Chaucer Life-Records*, ed. by Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 54. For wider details of Chaucer's associates beyond Clanvowe, Neville, Sturry, Clifford, and Gower, see the fundamental studies Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), and Marion Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

<sup>20</sup> See Martha Carlin, 'Gower's Life', in *Historians on John Gower*, ed. by Stephen H. Rigby and Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2019), <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2102306&site=ehost-live>> [accessed 20 April 2021]; this account corrects a number of misconceptions which have emerged from John Hurt Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (London: Methuen, 1965).

connected figures of Chaucer, Clanvowe, and Gower as a branch of this wider network, and one which is likely to have converged around London; Gower and Clanvowe held property in Kent and the West Midlands, respectively, but are likely to have spent time around the City and Westminster throughout their careers.<sup>21</sup> It should be noted that this circle of poets working around London is not to be equated with the strand of regional London literature identified and studied by Ralph Hanna.<sup>22</sup> One strength of Hanna's study is the emphasis it places on the strand which it addresses as a regional movement situated in London, in contrast to the metropolitan claims which are implicit in the mode of poetry pursued by Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe; he finds the culmination of his movement in Langland.

In the light of the wider coterie producing *dits amoureux* on either side of the Channel, it is remarkable, as stated earlier, that Chaucer, Clanvowe, and Gower were alone in their composition of *pastoralia* alongside *dits amoureux*, particularly given that they lacked the clerical training of Machaut and Froissart. Where Machaut was a lay canon, and Froissart a lay clerk who later became a beneficed priest and canon, Chaucer and Gower were squires and Clanvowe a knight. Attention to the difference in these three writers' approach to religious dissent has diverted attention from their common interest in *pastoralia*: Clanvowe was an early Wycliffite, Gower an early polemicist against the Wycliffite movement, and Chaucer recondite in his response to the Wycliffites, in a fashion which has proved to be a fertile ground for speculative critical readings.<sup>23</sup> Behind this division, there is a deep similarity between the *Two Ways*, the

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<sup>21</sup> See Carlin, 'Gower's Life', and McFarlane.

<sup>22</sup> See Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300-1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 390-445, treats all three writers attentively; McFarlane is a crucial reference point for Chaucer and Clanvowe. For Clanvowe see also V. J. Scattergood, 'The Date of Sir John Clanvowe's *The Two Ways* and the "Reinvention of Lollardy"', *Medium Ævum* 79. 1 (2010), 116-20. Cautious pursuit of the possibility of Wycliffite sympathy from Chaucer can be found in Alan J. Fletcher,

Parson's Tale, and the *Mirour de l'omme*. All three are treatises which urge their audience to turn away from sin and follow virtue through an appeal to basic and enumerated elements of doctrine, and employ a pronounced *ordinatio partium* as a formal demonstration of the conclusive nature of their argument.<sup>24</sup> This thesis uses *pastoralia* to refer to this particular tradition of religious writing. *Pastoralia* was established by Leonard Boyle as a broad term to refer to the vast range of textual aids to the *cura animarum* produced from the Third Lateran Council (1179) onwards, and particularly following the Fourth Lateran Council (1215).<sup>25</sup> The Parson's Tale, the *Mirour*, and the *Two Ways* all belong to a single subsidiary branch of *pastoralia*, namely, extended treatises which address a lay audience and aim to produce a practical

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'Chaucer the Heretic', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 25 (2003), 53-121; Andrew Cole, *Literature and Heresy in the Age of Chaucer*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 71 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Karen A. Winstead, 'Chaucer's Parson's Tale and the Contours of Orthodoxy', *Chaucer Review*, 43. 3 (2009), 239-59. More speculative readings include Katherine C. Little, *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), pp. 79-100; Frances M. McCormack, *Chaucer and the Culture of Dissent: The Lollard Context and Subtext of the Parson's Tale* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007); and Derrick G. Pitard, 'Sowing Difficulty: The Parson's Tale, Vernacular Commentary, and the Nature of Chaucerian Dissent', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 26 (2004), 299-330.

<sup>24</sup> For *ordinatio partium* as a formal feature and a mode of argument, see the classic M. B. Parkes, 'The Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* on the Development of the Book', in *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt*, ed. by Jonathan Alexander and Margaret Gibson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 115-41.

<sup>25</sup> Boyle's wide conception of *pastoralia* is set out in two summative articles: Leonard E. Boyle, 'The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology', in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. by Thomas J. Heffernan, Tennessee Studies in Literature, 28 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), pp. 30-43, and Leonard E. Boyle, 'The Inter-Conciliar Period 1179-1215 and the Beginnings of Pastoral Manuals', in *Miscellanea, Rolando Bandinelli, Papa Alessandro III*, ed. by Filippo Liota (Siena: Accademia Senese degli intronati, 1986), pp. 45-56. The development of this position is helpfully exposed in Joseph Goering, 'Leonard E. Boyle and the Invention of *Pastoralia*', in *A Companion to Pastoral Care in the Late Middle Ages (1200-1500)*, ed. by Ronald J. Stansbury, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition, 22 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 7-20; it is fundamentally indebted to W. A. Pantin, *The English Church in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955).



enactment of doctrine.<sup>26</sup> Such works have been the subject of increasing academic attention, but have not been collected into a stable taxonomy. Recent studies have often treated them under the heading of ‘vernacular theology’ (a term first employed in A. I. Doyle’s seminal and unpublished PhD thesis), which has a similarly wide remit to *pastoralia*, and which provides the beneficial effect of both framing these treatises as acts of intellectual attention and foregrounding their relationship to a wider body of Latin religious writing.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, the term ‘vernacular theology’ has been employed as a basis for the examination of vernacular religious writing which does not assume that use of the vernacular limits the intellectual sophistication of the theology implicit in such works.<sup>28</sup> On the other, it has been used to facilitate the reading of vernacular treatises alongside the more extensive intellectual mainstream of Latin theology, centring attention on the vernacular as a medium which tends to be permeable, and theology as an art which demands the consideration of multiple texts read in concert.<sup>29</sup> In a sometimes contrasting approach, vernacular religious treatises

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<sup>26</sup> For a sense of how small this section is, see the diagram of *pastoralia*’s various modes supplied in Boyle, ‘The Fourth Lateran’.

<sup>27</sup> A. I. Doyle, ‘A Survey of the Origins and Circulation of Theological Writings in English in the Fourteenth, Fifteenth and Early Sixteenth Centuries with Special Consideration of the Part of the Clergy therein’, 2 vols (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge, 1953), referenced in Vincent Gillespie, ‘Vernacular Theology’, in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, ed. by Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 401-20, as part of a thorough introduction to the term’s history.

<sup>28</sup> The case for this approach is classically made in Nicholas Watson, ‘Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409’, *Speculum*, 70. 4 (1995), 822-64.

<sup>29</sup> For an introduction to this usage, see Gillespie, ‘Vernacular Theology’, as well as Vincent Gillespie, ‘Religious Writing’, in *The Oxford History of Literary Translation in English, volume 1: to 1550*, ed. by Roger Ellis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. 234-83. An eccentric depiction of the ability of ‘vernacular theology’ to connect the treatises it approaches to wider currents in religious thought can be found in Thomas Betteridge, ‘Vernacular Theology’, in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. by Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 188-205.; this article is anomalous because it subsumes almost any expression of religious conviction to the term.

have also received the sustained attention of book historians, in studies which have tended to avoid imposing strong generic categories on these works outside of the evidence presented by actual codices.<sup>30</sup> This thesis takes it as established that there is generic alignment between, for example, the *Two Ways*, the Parson's Tale, and the *Mirour*, and uses the term *pastoralia* to refer to this alignment because the shared features aim to provoke a practical care of the soul more immediately than they aim to articulate theology.

The composition of both *dits amoureux* and *pastoralia* by Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe is significant because the two traditions make contradictory demands in relation to narrative and moral consequence. *Dits amoureux* draw on a philosophical tradition that presents poetry as an art of distortion which has limited access to truth; they respond to this widely circulated scholastic premise by presenting their narrative as a study in distortion. They relate it from the perspective of a single *persona*, whose existence rests on the state of writing as a representation of speech, and they concentrate on the experience of being in love, with particular attention to myths, dreams, and writing left by other *personae* whose perspective is closed. The poets who compose *dits amoureux* justify this mode of distortion by creating what this thesis will refer to as a narrative frame – they separate the events which their narratives relate from the normal course of time, sometimes by setting them in a dream, sometimes by their *persona* asserting that he relates events that have occurred sufficiently far in the past as to be no longer immediately pertinent, and sometimes by depicting a process of repentance undertaken by the *persona* between the events related and the act of their relation in the

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<sup>30</sup> See, for instance, Vincent Gillespie, 'Vernacular Books of Religion', in *Book Production and Publishing in Britain, 1375-1475*, ed. by Jeremy Griffiths and Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 317-44; Hanna, *London Literature*; and, recently, Daniel Sawyer, *Reading English Verse in Manuscript, c. 1350-c. 1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

present.<sup>31</sup> This frame lends a special characteristic to the poem's narrative, detaching it from moral consequence: any effects of the decisions made in the poem's distorted space, and under the effects of its distortion, do not fall under the remit of the poem's attention. In contrast to this arresting of moral consequence, *pastoralia* tend to use the prospect of consequence to urge its audience to moral action. The body of doctrine laid out in *pastoralia* culminates in the premise that the world exists as an unfinished narrative: after the events related in the Gospels, salvation is available to everyone in the Church, but in a form which demands an informed response from each individual in the world, in preparation for the coming judgement. This judgement is the end of salvation history's narrative; it can still be shaped by action in the present and reading *pastoralia* is part of that action.

The first chapter of this thesis examines the contradictions between these forms more closely. It recognises that both *dits amoureux* and *pastoralia* draw attention to a mode of writing which is opposed to their work: *dits amoureux* frequently attend to matters of moral urgency and the prospect of religious significance, only to set them aside in the establishment of their poetic space dedicated to play, while works of *pastoralia* often draw their audience's attention to the morally inconsequential works to which they offer an alternative. This mutual implication does not ease the problems which emerge from a single writer composing both *dits amoureux* and *pastoralia*: the chapter proceeds to examine the tension between Clanvowe's *Book of Cupid* and *Two Ways* regarding narrative and moral consequence, and the pressure that this places on the *Book of Cupid*'s narrative frame, a problem which was not resolved before Clanvowe's untimely death.

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<sup>31</sup> This overview is indebted to the commentary on the form of Chaucer's dream poems and their francophone heritage in Alastair J. Minnis, with V. J. Scattergood and J. J. Smith, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), particularly pp. 36-72 and pp. 399-423.

The remainder of this thesis examines this tension in the narrative frame as a continuous and formative pressure in Gower and Chaucer's work. Chapter Two examines how Gower spent the earlier part of his career attempting to develop the role of the poet into a position which bears moral responsibility. In the *Mirour de l'omme* and the *Vox clamantis* Gower takes up *pastoralia* at the point where it overlapped with medieval conceptions of satire, in order to ground the poet as a figure of moral authority with particular responsibility for a mode of doctrinal instruction. He augments this position by presenting the distortion undertaken in the *dits amoureux* as analogous to the distortion of virtue in sin more widely, using the poet's ability to manipulate this distortion as the basis to establish the poet as a stable authority on the subject of repentance. Chapter Three examines Chaucer's approach to the *dits amoureux* and moral writing in the earlier part of his career: it attends to his credentials as a moralist, established long before the Parson's Tale and based in his translations of authoritative religious treatises, along with the strict division which he maintained between this work and his composition of poetry. In contrast to Gower, Chaucer resisted the prospect of a synthesis between his two modes of writing and sectioned his poetry off from his moral translations with a particularly rigid use of the narrative frame. This separation of moral authority from poetry was met with some consternation within Chaucer's lifetime: Thomas Usk addresses Chaucer's moral and poetic work in his *Testament of Love* and responds to it in a form which conjoins poetry and moral philosophy.

Chapters Four and Five examine the later part of Chaucer and Gower's careers, and their radical alteration of the narrative frame in the *Confessio amantis* and the *Canterbury Tales*. Chapter Four argues that the *Confessio* sees a significant concession from Gower to the *dits amoureux* in his decision to occupy the *persona* of a lover and retell a body of mythic narratives. However, Gower uses the narrative frame to re-invent the mode of play which it facilitates. While the narrative of Amans' confession to

Genius explores distortion and imperfection in ways which Gower had avoided in his earlier work, it does so according to the Seven Deadly Sins. The relationship between conduct in a love affair and fully moral conduct is under-determined in the poem's confession, and major events in salvation history are narrated on the same level as mythic narratives; it is therefore unsurprising that critics continue to dispute how these elements of the poem relate to one another. It is nonetheless clear that these elements have to remain in dialogue with one another in a way unprecedented in *dits amoureux*. The *Confessio*'s narrative frame is permeable; rather than creating a space for poetic play which is detached from moral consequence, Gower creates a space for play with morality. In response to this, Chaucer employs a similarly permeable frame in the *Canterbury Tales*, but one which takes as its basis the conventions of satire and self-examination which Gower had adapted to formulate his mode of moral poetry in the *Mirour* and the *Vox*.

Chapter Five examines the use of this adjusted narrative frame in the context of Chaucer and Gower's wider writing. It finds that Gower articulates it as a morally responsible mode of composing poetry which stands alongside his work in the *Mirour* and the *Vox*, its integrity assured by its shared authorship with these more rigorous works. The moral play of the *Confessio* is a space which an audience can consciously enter and leave, and can use to aid a responsible exploration of moral issues as well as to pursue pleasure. Quite differently, Chaucer does not allow for a stable reconciliation between his position in the *Canterbury Tales* and his moral translations. As he closes the narrative frame of the *Tales* in his Retraction, he disowns his poetic work in a gesture which is itself knowingly poetic; his audience is left with no easy resolution to the problems this raises, and is forced to meet both a desire to reconcile the poetic with the moral, and the prospect that such a reconciliation might not be available.

This thesis considers Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe's work in the light of two contexts which have generally been addressed separately. Scholars have increasingly taken approaches informed by French poetry or approaches informed by religious writing. The fundamental work of Charles Muscatine and James I. Wimsatt has ensured that Chaucer's poetry is often read in the light of its francophone contexts, and both R. F. Yeager and Peter Nicholson have performed a similar service for Gower.<sup>32</sup> For complex reasons which are addressed in Chapter Three, fewer studies foreground religious writing as a context to Chaucer's work, but exceptions are outstanding in the work of Siegfried Wenzel, Thomas Bestul, Larry Scanlon, and Elizabeth Allen.<sup>33</sup> Scholars have often foregrounded broad religious contexts to Gower's work, and have sometimes set these in relation to his response to francophone poetry, but they have rarely identified the close parity between his work and specific traditions of *pastoralia*, as detailed in Chapter Two.<sup>34</sup> Detailed attention has rarely been brought to the francophone context of these poets' work at the same time as their response to *pastoralia*. This thesis argues that the significance of *dits amoureux* and *pastoralia* to Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe's work can only be recognised when the two contexts are considered together. In this regard, I will read the work of these poets in relation to a

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<sup>32</sup> See Muscatine, *French Tradition*; Wimsatt, *Chaucer and the French Love Poets*; Wimsatt, *Chaucer and his Contemporaries*; Yeager, *Gower's Poetic*; and Nicholson, *Love and Ethics*.

<sup>33</sup> See, for instance, Siegfried Wenzel, 'Chaucer and the Language of Contemporary Preaching', *Studies in Philology*, 73. 2 (1976), 138-61, and Siegfried Wenzel, 'Notes on the Parson's Tale', *Chaucer Review*, 16. 3 (1982), 237-56; Thomas Bestul, 'Chaucer's *Parson's Tale* and the Late-Medieval Tradition of Religious Meditation', *Speculum*, 64. 3 (1989), 600-19; Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and Elizabeth Allen, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>34</sup> See Yeager, *Gower's Poetic*; Nicholson, *Love and Ethics*; T. Matthew N. McCabe, *Gower's Vulgar Tongue: Ovid, Lay Religion, and English Poetry in the Confessio amantis*, Publications of the John Gower Society, 6 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011); and Matthew W. Irvin, *The Poetic Voices of John Gower: Politics and Personae in the Confessio amantis*, Publications of the John Gower Society, 9 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2014).

variety of dissonant literary traditions, acknowledging their eclectic literary formation; this attention to eclecticism in these writers work responds to studies of the instability of the poetic tradition Chaucer had a role in creating in late fourteenth-century London undertaken by both Christopher Cannon and Ralph Hanna.<sup>35</sup> Beyond this, my research will challenge assumptions which have underpinned recent critical work on the so-called religious turn. While academic attention to late-medieval religious writing has increased markedly, it has too often managed to reinforce a stable distinction between ‘religious writing’ and other forms of writing – even when it has undertaken a closer and more sympathetic examination of previously neglected religious material. Richard Firth Green’s suggestion that devotional and moral writing were primarily the means by which a poet could pursue patronage as a specialist in a court environment in which amorous poetry was promoted as a universal aristocratic pursuit has had a particularly pronounced influence in the construction of this division, but it has been reinforced by a tendency for studies which attend more closely to devotional and moral writing to set poetry aside entirely.<sup>36</sup> Intriguingly, studies which approach the connections between religious writing and other modes have tended to emphasise the cultural separation in their efforts to make a case for the importance of reading both together.<sup>37</sup> Further to this,

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<sup>35</sup> See Christopher Cannon, *Middle English Literature: A Cultural History* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2008); ‘Chaucer and the Auchinleck Manuscript Revisited’, *Chaucer Review*, 46. 1-2 (2011), 131-46; and *From Literacy to Literature: England, 1300-1400* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), alongside the search for a counter-narrative to Chaucerian developments which underpins Hanna, *London Literature*.

<sup>36</sup> See Richard Firth Green, *Poets and Princepleasers: Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), pp. 135-67; examples of studies which shape their corpus around religious literature include Nicole R. Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), and Daniel McCann, *Soul-Health: Therapeutic Reading in Later Medieval England* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2018).

<sup>37</sup> See, for instance, Michelle Bolduc, *The Medieval Poetics of Contraries* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), or Barbara Newman, *Medieval Crossover: Reading the Secular Against the Sacred* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2013). A notable exception to this will be returned to throughout this thesis – the three articles on Chaucer by Nicholas Watson: Nicholas Watson, ‘Christian Ideologies’, in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. by Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 75-89; Nicholas

when recent criticism has read non-religious writing in the light of its religious context, it has tended to produce ‘religious readings’ of texts, in which elements of latent religious significance are pursued.<sup>38</sup> This thesis will not directly challenge this last tendency as a critical approach, but will suggest that it overlooks a more basic opportunity to look at Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe as writers who are religious but whose work does not always account for that fact, and who often write through a conflict between the urgency for religious action and the other pursuits they undertake in their activity as writers. While this thesis primarily attends to the development of the narrative frame in these poets’ work, it is really in pursuit of an untidy historicism: it would look back to Bruce McFarlane’s conclusion when confronted with Clanvowe’s identity as the author of the *Two Ways* and the *Book of Cupid*, and a witness to Chaucer’s release from criminal charges – that an attempt to resolve these difficulties into a single clear ideology would falsify the evidence.<sup>39</sup> The importance of Chaucer and, to a degree, Gower, as foundational figures in histories of English poetry instils a pressure to concentrate on their writing as a coherent form of poetry which was not readily available to them, and which their attention to *pastoralia* suggests that they

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Watson, ‘Chaucer’s Public Christianity’, *Religion and Literature*, 37. 2 (2005), 99-114; and Nicholas Watson, ‘Langland and Chaucer’, in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, ed. by Andrew Hass, David Jasper, and Elisabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 363-81.

<sup>38</sup> This is particularly evident in the essays collected in *Chaucer and Religion*: see, for instance Stephen Knight, “‘Toward the Fen’: Church and Churl in Chaucer’s Fabliaux’, in *Chaucer and Religion*, ed. by Helen Phillips, *Christianity and Culture: Issues in Teaching and Research*, 4 (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 41-51; Anthony Bale, “‘A Maner Latyn Corrupt’: Chaucer and the Absent Religions’, in *Chaucer and Religion*, ed. by Helen Phillips, *Christianity and Culture: Issues in Teaching and Research*, 4 (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 52-64; or Helen Phillips, ‘Morality in the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer’s Lyrics, and the *Legend of Good Women*’, in *Chaucer and Religion*, ed. by Helen Phillips, *Christianity and Culture: Issues in Teaching and Research*, 4 (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 156-71. The same tendency can be found in Robert Boenig, *Chaucer and the Mystics: The Canterbury Tales and the Genre of Devotional Prose* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1995) and, more recently, John Bugbee, *God’s Patients: Chaucer, Agency, and the Nature of Laws* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019).

<sup>39</sup> McFarlane, p. 206.



would resist. Attending to the work of Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe as eclectic responses to a number of contemporary cultural forces which they did not always resolve can help us recognise the pressure that the desire for a poetic tradition has exerted on its own foundational material. The fundamental weakness of too many positions on the relationship between poetry and religious writing in late fourteenth-century England remains that they are ‘far too logical’; they do not respond carefully enough to a historical environment which was made up of untidy conflicting interests, and had no access to an understanding of how these interests would later clarify and develop.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> McFarlane, p. 206.

## Chapter 1

## Time, Consequence, and the Narrative Frame

This chapter examines how *dits amoureux* and *pastoralia* in the fourteenth century employ narrative in contrasting ways. In *dits amoureux*, a narrative frame separates the narrative proper from the linear course of time which runs into the present of the text's reception and the future of the consequences this entails; *pastoralia* emphasise the continuity of all time in the single great narrative of salvation history. Both traditions acknowledge that their approach to narrative is met with dissent elsewhere. *Dits amoureux* often consider the weight of moral consequence only to set it aside in relating their poetic narrative, as in Guillaume de Machaut's account of the plague in the *Jugement de roi de Navarre*, while *pastoralia* regularly inform their audience of the literature they could be reading that lacks due pertinence to salvation, as can be found in the opening of Robert Manning of Brunne's *Handlyng Synne*. However, this recognition is not sufficient to ease the pressure on the writer who composes both fully fledged *dits amoureux* and *pastoralia*. This chapter concludes by examining Clanvowe's *Book of Cupid* and *Two Ways*; it finds that the narrative frame employed in the *Book of Cupid* is unable to sustain the weight of the demands around moral consequence made in the *Two Ways*. Only a narrative which assumes a process of repentance in Clanvowe's life between the two works would allow them to exist alongside one another without difficulty, and it would fall to the audience to supply any such narrative.

The Narrative Frame in *Dits amoureux*

In fourteenth-century western Europe, poetry was often presented as an art of distortion, with little purchase on philosophical truth. This claim was frequently substantiated by a commonplace from Lactantius, who objects to pagan beliefs drawn from the poets:

Nesciunt enim qui sit poeticae licentiae modus, quousque progredi fingendo liceat, cum officium poetae in eo sit, ut ea quae uere gesta sunt in alias species obliquis figurationibus cum decore aliquo conuersa traducat.

For they do not know what the mode of poetic licence is, how far it is allowed to go in making things up, when the office of the poet is in this: that things which really happened are handed over into other appearances through oblique figurations, turned over with a certain dignity.<sup>1</sup>

This passage was prominent in the treatment of poetry provided by two of the foremost encyclopaedic works, Isidore of Seville's *Etymologies* and Vincent of Beauvais' *Speculum maius*.<sup>2</sup> Its claims were also reiterated in the *Eclogue* of Theodulus, the first introduction to classical poetry which pupils would receive at grammar school, and one of the few school texts to remain on the curriculum from the twelfth century to the sixteenth.<sup>3</sup> The *Eclogue* presents a singing contest between Pseustis (Falsehood), a

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<sup>1</sup> Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius, *Divinarum institutionum libri septem*, ed. by Eberhard Heck and Antonie Wlosok, 4 vols (Munich: Saur, 2005-2011), I (2005), 1. 11. 24. For the influence of this commonplace and similar conceptions of poetry, see Nicolette Zeeman, 'The Schools Give a License to Poets', in *Criticism and Dissent in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Rita Copeland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 151-80; and Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter, Introduction to *Medieval Grammar and Rhetoric: Language Arts and Literary Theory, AD 300-1475*, ed. by Rita Copeland and Ineke Sluiter (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), pp. 1-60.

<sup>2</sup> See Isidore of Seville [Isidorus Hispalensis], *Eymologiae sive originum libri xx*, ed. by W. M. Lindsay, 2 vols (London: Clarendon Press, 1911), I. 7. 7, and Vincent of Beauvais [Vincentius belvacensis], *Speculum doctrinale* (Strasbourg: R-Printer, c.1477), 4. 110.

<sup>3</sup> The *Eclogue* survived the thirteenth-century transition from *sex auctores* (the *Distichs* of Cato, the *Eclogue*, Aesop's fables, the *Elegies* of Maximian, Claudian's *De raptu Proserpinae*, and Statius' *Achilleid*) to the more morally conservative *octo auctores* (*Distichs* of Cato, the *Eclogue*, Aesop's fables, Alain of Lille's *Parabola*, Matthew of Vendôme's *Tobias*, the *Chartula de contemptu mundi*, the *Liber facetus* on conduct, and the *Liber floretus* on rudimentary religious doctrine); see Tony Hunt *Teaching and*

Greek goatherd who retells myths in quotations from the Latin poets, and Aletheia (Truth), a shepherdess from the line of David who replies to each myth with a corresponding event from the Old Testament, drawn from late classical Christian poets.<sup>4</sup> For instance, the assault of the giants on Mount Olympus is resolved into the scripturally authorised story of the Tower of Babel:

Pseustis  
 Surrexere viri Terra genitrice creati:  
 Pellere caelicolas fuit omnibus una voluntas;  
 Mons culminat montem, sed totum Juppiter hostem  
 Fulmine deiectum Vulcani trusit in antrum.

Alithia  
 Posteritas Adae summa Babilonis in arce  
 Turrim construxit, quae caelum tangere possit.  
 Excitat ira Deum: confusio fit labiorum;  
 Disperguntur ibi; nomen non excidit urbi.

Pseustis  
 The men created by mother Earth rose up: one will was with them all – to throw out the heaven-dwellers; mountain stood upon mountain, but Jupiter bound all the foe in a cave, cast down with Vulcan’s thunderbolt.

Aletheia  
 The greatest descendant of Adam built a tower at the height of Babylon, which could touch the heavens. Wrath awoke God: a confusion came upon their tongues; they were separated there; the name did not pass from the city.<sup>5</sup>

In separating the truth from the poetic figures in Aletheia’s verses, the *Eclogue* leaves poetry which is not dedicated to the narrative of salvation history as a kernel of no clear

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*Learning Latin in Thirteenth-Century England*, 3 vols (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 1991). For the deep influence of grammar school formation on fourteenth-century English poetry, see Christopher Cannon, *From Literacy to Literature: England, 1300-1400* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> See Johann Osternacher, *Quos auctores latinos et sacrorum bibliorum locos Theodulus imitatus esse videatur* (Urfahr: Petrinum, 1907), and Bernard of Utrecht, *Commentum in Theodolum*, ed. by R. B. C. Huygens, *Biblioteca degli studi medievali*, 8 (Spoleto: Centro italiano di studi sull’alto Medioevo, 1977).

<sup>5</sup> Theodulus, *Ecloga*, ed. by Johann Osternacher in *Quos auctores latinos et sacrorum bibliorum locos Theodulus imitatus esse videatur* (Urfahr: Petrinum, 1907), ll. 85-92.

benefit once it has been deciphered. The *Eclogue* ends with Aletheia turning to how the Gospels bear witness to the incarnation:

Quattuor imprimis evangelicae rationis  
Nitar codicibus, nostrum de virgine corpus  
Ut Deus accepit, nec me labor iste gravabit.

Above all I will trust in the four books of evangelical reason, that God took up our body from the Virgin, nor will this work grieve me.<sup>6</sup>

This is a narrative before which Pseustis surrenders, with no poetic figure to match it: ‘Quo tendit, cedo nec me cessisse negabo’ (‘Where this goes, I cede and will not deny to have ceded’).<sup>7</sup> It is unclear what good poetry can do other than encode truth which is available by other means; on its first introduction to fourteenth-century pupils, poetry was presented as an art which cannot in itself convey truth and which is bound to be set aside when considered in the light of the revelation of Christ. This position did not preclude poetry from having an ethical importance: schoolroom commentaries on texts like Ovid’s *Heroides* often presented poetry as an arena for ethical discernment, and sophisticated Aristotelian scholarship like that of Roger Bacon attended to theories of imagination which emphasised the prospect which poetry offered for the exploration of an arena of autonomous moral difficulty.<sup>8</sup> It also did not prevent poetry from being true in less intellectual ways; the relationship between poetry and a truth to feeling and to lived memory has been the subject of insightful studies by Adrian Armstrong and Sarah

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<sup>6</sup> Theodulus, ll. 330-32.

<sup>7</sup> Theodulus, l. 336.

<sup>8</sup> The classic study is Judson Boyce Allen, *The Ethical Poetic of the Later Middle Ages: A Decorum of Convenient Distinction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), which has received important recent revision in Vincent Gillespie, ‘Ethice subponitur? The Imaginative Syllogism and the Idea of the Poetic’, in *Medieval Thought Experiments: Poetry, Hypothesis, and Experience in the European Middle Ages*, ed. by Philip Knox, Jonathan Morton, and Daniel Reeve, *Disputatio*, 31 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 297-327.

Kay, as well as Finn Sinclair, all of which attend at length to *dits amoureux*.<sup>9</sup>

Nonetheless, the authoritative positions provided by both Lactantius and Theodulus set out a situation in which it is difficult to find any quality which pertains to philosophical truth or theological utility inherent in the poetic.

The *dits amoureux* accept the premise that poetry is a mode of distortion and insignificant in the light of Christian revelation. They depart from the technique of treating poetic narratives as figures to be resolved into philosophical and moral meaning – an approach which was not only prominent in basic grammar school education, but also widely circulated in school commentaries on the classical poets and the influential *Ovide moralisé*, an adaptation of most classical myths, along with commentaries, into French verse.<sup>10</sup> In Machaut's *Dit de la fontaine amoureuse*, for instance, there is no prospect that the stories of Ceyx and Alcyone or the judgement of Paris should be primarily understood as encoded moral principles. In place of this approach, *dits amoureux* treat poetry as a study in distortion: they relate a narrative in a manner that concentrates on the limitations of perspective, the facility with which understanding is constrained, and the possibility of being deceived without resolution. The *Fontaine amoureuse*'s account of Ceyx and Alcyone, for instance, situates the events of the myth in a dialogue with the conditions of its setting in the poem. Ceyx and Alcyone are

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<sup>9</sup> See Adrian Armstrong and Sarah Kay, *Knowing Poetry: Verse in Medieval France from the Rose to the Rhétoriciens* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Finn Sinclair, 'Memory and Voice in Jean Froissart's *dit amoureux*', *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, 22 (2011), 139-49; and Finn Sinclair, 'Poetic Creation in Jean Froissart's *L'Espinette amoureux* and *Le Joli buisson de jonece*', *Modern Philology*, 109. 4 (2012), 425-39.

<sup>10</sup> Beyond the basic curriculum, major commentaries provided philosophical interpretations for poetic narratives, most prominently the 'Vulgate' commentary on the *Metamorphoses* – see *The Vulgate Commentary on Ovid's Metamorphoses: The Creation Myth and the Story of Orpheus*, ed. by Frank T. Coulson, Toronto Medieval Latin Texts, 20 (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1991), and *The Vulgate Commentary on Ovid's Metamorphoses Book I*, ed. by Frank T. Coulson (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2015).

separated by a sea voyage and death just as the figure of the knight whom Machaut's *persona* hears relating the story is to be separated from his lover, and as Machaut's *persona* is separated from the experience of his sorrow in his recording of that knight's lament; while all of these conditions are underpinned by the audience's understanding that the entire episode is a creation of Machaut's writing, and not just the lament itself. Such attention to poetry as an art which is receptive to obstruction and error differs significantly from the contemporary understanding of poetry developed in Italy of poetry as a prestigious calling which can be intrinsic to the pursuit of philosophical or theological good.<sup>11</sup> Its origins lie in the *Roman de la rose*, in particular in Jean de Meun's later and longer section of the poem, which emerged from a university setting and frequently returns to the prospect of poetry as a mode that can frustrate philosophy. Alastair Minnis has observed that the treatment of mythological narratives derived from classical poetry in *dits amoureux* is largely indebted to the *Rose*'s tendency to juxtapose the prospect of such narratives being deciphered into philosophical terms with their treatment as self-sufficient, fleshed-out fictional worlds, while Jonathan Morton has established that this tendency in the *Rose* was engaged in conversation with contemporary philosophy in such a way as to claim a place for poetry as an agent of distortion in scholastic thought.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> See Alastair J. Minnis, A. Brian Scott, and David Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism, c. 1100-c. 1375: The Commentary Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 373-519.

<sup>12</sup> See Alastair J. Minnis, *Magister amoris: The Roman de la rose and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), supplemented by the more extensive differentiation between the approach of the *Rose*, *dits amoureux*, and the *Ovide moralisé* in Alastair J. Minnis, with V. J. Scattergood and J. J. Smith, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 91-99; see Jonathan Morton, *The Romance of the Rose in its Philosophical Context: Art, Nature, and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). For wider attention to the debt of the *dits amoureux* to the *Rose* see Sylvia Huot, *The Romance of the Rose and its Medieval Readers: Interpretation, Reception, Manuscript Transmission* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

The *dits amoureux* imitate the *Rose* in their relation of their narrative from the perspective of a single *persona* and their concentration on the experience of falling in love. Even more evidently than the *Rose*, they foreground the existence of this *persona* as something which happens in writing as a representation of speech: this reaches such points of virtuosity as Guillaume de Machaut's *Livre du voir dit*, where the *persona* of Guillaume who delivers the poem exchanges letters and lyric verses with a lover, 'Toute Belle', who exists on the same plane of writing as him; Jean Froissart's *Prison amoureuse*, in which Froissart's lover *persona* passes letters of advice under the pseudonym 'Flos' to another lover, 'Rose', who is only represented by his letters; and Oton de Granson's *Livre messire Ode*, in which the lover *persona* spontaneously utters love lyrics in a dream which he immediately proceeds to write down in a book, with that book presented as the poem itself. Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet and Anthony Spearing have argued that an exploration of writing as a representation of speech should be seen as a constitutive feature of the *dit* as poetic form more broadly, reaching back to Rutebeuf.<sup>13</sup> *Dits amoureux* set this mode of play with textual illusion in dialogue with myths and dreams, other illusory ways of seeing. In Machaut's *Dit de la fontaine amoureuse*, the narrating *persona* hears the knight's lamentation, writes it down as a *complainte*, and later falls asleep, sitting over him, to share a dream based on the judgement of Paris; in Froissart's *Joli buisson de jeunesse* the ageing *persona* looks on an old painting of his beloved from his youth and is then drawn by the goddess Venus into a dream in which he is young again and can relive events similar to those of Froissart's earlier *Espinette amoureuse*.

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<sup>13</sup> See Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet, 'Le Clerc et l'écriture: le *Voir dit* de Guillaume de Machaut et la définition du *dit*', in *Literatur in der Gesellschaft des Spätmittelalters*, ed. by Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht (Heidelberg: Winter, 1980), pp. 151-68; and A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Autographies: The 'I' of the Text* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012), pp. 33-64. These studies complement the perspective taken on the thirteenth century in Michel Zink, *La Subjectivité littéraire: autour du siècle de saint Louis* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1985).



The *dits amoureux* sustain this project by holding their narrative away from any point at which it would have to meet the narrative of salvation history, the ‘Quo tendit’ which reveals poetry’s vanity as a distorting art. They achieve this by employing a narrative frame: the majority of *dits amoureux* feature one or more device which breaks the continuity between the narrative the poem relates and the course of time from its present to the future. The narrative is presented as having occurred in a dream, at another stage of life, or in a spiritual state which the narrator no longer occupies: any implications it has in regard to salvation history are pre-emptively neutralised. The dream is the simplest of these devices. It was established as a central way of exploring distortion in the *Roman de la rose*, which contains its entire narrative in a dream, ending with the line ‘Atant fu jorz, et je m’esveille’ (‘With that it was day and I woke up’; *RR*, l. 21,750) As mentioned already, dreams became a regular motif in *dits amoureux*: Machaut’s *Dit du vergier*, Froissart’s *Paradis d’amour* and *Joli buisson de jeunesse*, and Granson’s *Songe saint Valentin* and *Livre messire Ode* each present the main course of their narrative occurring in the narrator’s dream or state of reverie. These poems each acknowledge that dreams can be deceitful, but also present the dream as an event of sufficient significance to be worth narrating. This significance is never determined; it never has to be reconciled with the wider demands of time or the narrative of salvation history.

The *Rose* also introduces the principle that the narrative occurred in the narrator’s youth:

El vintieme an de mon aage,  
 el point qu’Amors prent le paage  
 des jones genz, couchier m’aloie  
 une nuit, si con je soloie.

In the twentieth year of my age, at the point when Love takes his toll on young people, I went to lie down one night as I was accustomed to.

(*RR*, ll. 21-24)

Youth is the stage of life in which amorous love occurs readily according to nature; the events of the dream which occurred in youth are examined by a narrator who is no longer in that state. The distortions which occur in the narrative are therefore presented as a state which is common and which is always outgrown; moreover, it is a state which has been outgrown at the time of narration.<sup>14</sup> Machaut and Froissart employ the same device, setting the *Remède de fortune* and the *Espinette amoureuse* in their youth, respectively. Froissart goes further in the *Joli buisson*, making it clear that his *persona* matches his actual circumstances as a poet at the time of writing, entering maturity and departing from love poetry to enter the priesthood. The love dream which he proceeds to narrate occurs as he wonders if he is making the right decision in a debate with Philosophy, revisits a painting of his beloved from his youth, and dreams of being young and a lover again; this has the result that youth and dreaming are aligned and presented as diversions from the path to salvation which are liable to occur according to nature, but which become more reprehensible when there is a clear vocation to higher things.

Of course, Froissart's *Joli buisson* is a *dit amoureux*; most of the poem is taken up with the narrative from which he eventually turns away. In this respect Froissart follows the third common device, the framing of the narrative as a series of events from which the narrator has since repented. This tradition was widely available and bore a high prestige due its importance to school *accessūs* to the works of Ovid; Ovid's youth

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<sup>14</sup> For the ages and their relative properties, see the classic study, J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986); for the relationship between nature, amorous love, and moral consequence, see Hugh White, *Nature, Sex, and Goodness in a Medieval Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

was used to explain his indulgence of erotic desire in the *Ars amatoria*, in contrast to the wisdom his myths were supposed to contain in the *Metamorphoses*, but both of these works were to be read in accordance with the wisdom he was understood to have developed as he aged and as he met with disfavour from Augustus for the lack of attention to moral consequence in his youthful poetry.<sup>15</sup> This narrative was complemented by the pseudepigraphal *De vetula* in the thirteenth century, a Latin poem which has Ovid recount the final deceit in love which led him to withdraw from life as a lover, and which depicts his subsequent pursuit of philosophy, eventually leading to a discernment of Christ's incarnation.<sup>16</sup> Across the same period, a repentance narrative began to order the careers of some contemporary poets, particularly Rutebeuf in the mid-thirteenth century.<sup>17</sup> Before the end of the century such a narrative emerged around Jean de Meun: three religious treatises began to circulate with a claim to his authorship, the *Testament*, the *Codicille*, and the *Douze articles de la foi*. These claims are still met with scepticism among specialists in the *Rose*, and the *Douze articles de la foi* was attributed to a certain Jean Chapuis on convincing grounds by Paulin Paris in the

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<sup>15</sup> For a set of late medieval *vitae Ovidii*, see Fausto Ghisalberti, 'Mediaeval Biographies of Ovid', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 9 (1946), 10-59. The most pertinent overview of the *accessus ad auctores* tradition, including Ovid's place in it, is Alastair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn with a new preface by the author (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010); see also the study of Ovid, ageing, and *auctoritas* in Minnis, *Magister amoris*, pp. 35-82. For an overview of Ovid's complex relationship with the school curriculum, see Ralph J. Hexter, *Ovid and Medieval Schooling: Studies in Medieval School Commentaries on Ovid's Ars amatoria, Epistulae ex ponto, and Epistulae heroidum*, Münchner Beiträge zur Mediävistik und Renaissance-Forschung, 38 (Munich: Arbo, 1986), and Vincent Gillespie, 'The Study of Classical and Secular Authors from the Twelfth Century to c. 1450', in *The Cambridge History of Literary Criticism, Volume 2: The Middle Ages*, ed. by Alastair J. Minnis and Ian Johnson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp. 145-235.

<sup>16</sup> See Paul Klopsch, *Pseudo-Ovidius de vetula: Untersuchungen und Text*, Mittellateinische Studien und Texte, 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1967).

<sup>17</sup> See Zink, *Subjectivité littéraire*, along with Rutebeuf, 'La Repentance de Rutebeuf', in *Œuvres complètes*, ed. by Michel Zink, 2 vols (Paris: Bordas, 1989-90), I (1989), 297-303.

nineteenth century; it is, however, clear that the *Testament* at least dates from Jean de Meun's lifetime.<sup>18</sup> These works present an aged narrator who has turned away from his youthful love poetry:

J'ai fait en ma juvenesce maint dit par vanité,  
 Ou maintes gens se sont plusieurs foiz delité;  
 Or m'en doint Diex un faire par vraie charité  
 Pour amender les autres qui poi m'ont proufité.

In my youth I made many poems in vanity, in which many people have delighted themselves many times; now may God grant me to make one in pure charity to amend the others, which have profited me little.<sup>19</sup>

These *maint dit* must be assumed to refer primarily to the Jean's continuation of the *Rose*: they do not fit his other works, translations of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae*, Abélard's *Historia calamitatum*, Vegetius' *De re militari*, Gerald of Wales' *Topographia hibernica*, and Aelred of Rievaulx's *De spirituali amicitia*.<sup>20</sup> The religious treatises attributed to Jean often survive in the same codices as the *Rose*;

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<sup>18</sup> See Paulin Paris, *Les Manuscrits françois de la bibliothèque du roi*, 7 vols (Paris: Techener, 1836-48), III (1840), 175-76; Silvia Buzzetti Gallarati, *Le Testament maistre Jehan de Meun: un caso letterario* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1989); Jean-Marie Fritz, 'Les Sept articles de la foi ou Jean de Meun à l'article de la mort', *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, 36 (2018), 91-114; and Jonathan Morton, Review of Gabriella I. Baika, *The Rose and Geryon: The Poetics of Fraud and Violence in Jean de Meun and Dante*, *French Studies*, 69. 2 (2015), 232. The only editions of the *Codicille* and the *Douze articles* do not use the common modern titles: *L'Abregié testament maistre Jehan de Meun*, ed. by Adelbert Keller, in *Romvart: Beiträge zur Kunde mittelalterlicher Dichtung aus italiänischen Bibliotheken* (Mannheim: Bessermann, 1844), pp. 328-31, provides the *Codicille*, while *Le Trésor de maistre Jehan de Meung, ou les Sept articles de la foi*, in *Le Roman de la rose*, ed. by Guillaume Dominique Martin Méon, 4 vols (Paris: Didot, 1813-14), III (1814), 331-95, provides the *Sept articles* which Paris attributed to Jean Chapuis.

<sup>19</sup> *Le Testament maistre Jehan de Meun*, ed. by Silvia Buzzetti Gallarati in *Le Testament maistre Jehan de Meun: un caso letterario* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1989), pp. 117-205 (ll. 5-8).

<sup>20</sup> This is based on the list provided in Jean's prologue to his Boethius translation – see Jean de Meun, *Li Livres de confort de philosophie*, in *Sources of the Boece*, ed. by Alastair J. Minnis and Tim William Machan (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2005); the Gerald of Wales and Aelred of Rievaulx translations do not survive. For the circulation of the religious treatises, see Paulin Paris, 'Jean de Meun: traducteur et poète', in Charles Osmond et al., *Histoire littéraire de la France*, 46 vols (Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1733-), XXVIII (1881), 391-439, alongside Gallarati.

regardless of the circumstances of their composition, in practice they circumscribe the *Rose* rather than replacing it, much as the *accessūs* do for Ovid's *Ars amatoria*. The device of the poet's repentance creates a narrative structure which acknowledges difficulty, in which two positions sit beside one another without any reconciliation offered by the text. This has the result that it becomes an act of resistance to the pious narrative of repentance to separate the narrative of distortion and condemn it as a work which is not conducive to salvation.

Some commentators have argued that this repentance can lead to a harmonisation. J. M. Moreau, for instance, suggests that the *Joli buisson*'s concluding prayer to the Virgin Mary operates not only as a departure from and correction of the amorous fantasies of youth pursued by Froissart's *persona* in the poem, but actually redeems – and to a degree rehabilitates – those fantasies of amorous love.<sup>21</sup> Moreau's case for reconciliation is relatively compelling, but it is not necessary; as Catherine Brown has convincingly argued, the juxtaposition of contrary amorous and devotional material is relatively common from at least the twelfth century onwards, and the tensions which it presents are often accepted without resolution.<sup>22</sup> Recently, Laura Ashe has argued that even the prospect of resolution might not have seemed as clear as it does to modern readers.<sup>23</sup> More conclusively, Jessica Rosenfeld has made the case that the rediscovery of Aristotle in the thirteenth century instigated a period of interrogation of the nature of desire and its fulfilment in both philosophy and poetry, with poets having the capacity to attend to the attainment of contingent worldly desire as something

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<sup>21</sup> See J. M. Moreau, *Eschatological Subjects: Divine and Literary Judgement in Fourteenth-Century French Poetry* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2014), pp. 144-88; this account builds on Sylvia Huot, 'Reading Across Genres: Froissart's *Joli buisson de jonece* and Machaut's Motets', *French Studies*, 57. 1 (2003), 1-10.

<sup>22</sup> See Catherine Brown, *Contrary Things: Exegesis, Dialectic, and the Poetics of Didacticism* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998).

<sup>23</sup> See Laura Ashe, 'How to Read Both: The Logic of True Contradictions in Chaucer's World', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 42 (2020), 111-46.

laudable under its own conditions.<sup>24</sup> Rosenfeld's argument is timely and important, but it is significant that the *dit amoureux* tradition is ready to make a sharp distinction which is not particularly Aristotelian. For instance, she explores the pursuit of love under the conditions of fortune in Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* as a pleasure which constitutes an independent and worthwhile good, distinct from the pleasure which Troilus is able to attain in the heavens after his death, but this risks overlooking the emphasis often placed on departure from the pursuit of such pleasure including its renunciation in the tradition of *dits amoureux* to which *Troilus* is indebted. When *dits amoureux* depict a turn to salvation they generally do depict an abandonment of worldly joy in amorous poetry: that is just what Froissart's *persona* is about at the start of the *Joli buisson*, and it is implicit in the depiction of Jean de Meun as a poet who outgrows his *Rose* and has to attend to other demands. These writers do not look back on their love poetry as an acceptable mode of pleasure aside from the prospect of religious judgement, even though there is a philosophical frame which would allow them to do so.

It is not the case that every *dit amoureux* features one of these devices framing its narrative. Machaut's *Livre du voir dit*, for instance, tells of a waking love affair which it claims to be ongoing, and closes with the narrator intertwining his devotion to his lady with his devotion to God:

Ma dame le savra de vrai,  
 Qu'autre dame jamais n'avrai,  
 Ains serai sien jusqu'a la fin;  
 Et, après ma mort, de cuer fin  
 La servira mes esperis;  
 - Or doint Dieus qu'il ne soit peris -  
 Pour Li tant prier qu'Il appelle  
 Son ame en gloire Toute Belle.  
 Amen.

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<sup>24</sup> See Jessica Rosenfeld, *Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry: Love after Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), in particular pp. 135-59.

My lady will truly know that I will never have another lady, but will be hers until the end; and, after my death, with a noble heart my spirit will serve her there – God grant that it may not perish – to pray to him so much that he may call her soul in glory All Beautiful.  
Amen.<sup>25</sup>

However, it remains the case that a significant enough proportion of *dits amoureux* composed by Machaut, Froissart, and Granson provide love narratives which are separated from the normal course of time for an audience to be ready to take any narrative in the tradition as a work of artifice, occupying a separate poetic space. The *Voir dit* foregrounds its lover *persona* as a poet already famous for his love poetry; an audience familiar with the tradition of Machaut's works would be aware that this love poetry has circled around the prospects of distorted vision, and elsewhere taken place in a reverie – as in the *Dit du vergier* – or been set in the poet's distant youth – as in the *Remède de fortune*.<sup>26</sup> The continuing presence of this love state at the end of the *Voir dit* accentuates the poem's claim to be *voir* – truthful where one would have to presume that the other *dits* were not – and in that respect a consummate work of artifice.

The narrative frame allows the events related in *dits amoureux* to take place, with the demands of continuous time, and ultimately of the salvation history to which poetry does not contribute, to be set aside. These demands are granted their due importance in reality and in the present, but the poem's narrative is moved away from the reality and the present. This has the effect that the poem can explore narrative in a way which is truly secular – attentive to the *saeculum*, the course of time that

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<sup>25</sup> Guillaume de Machaut, *Le Livre du voir dit (Le dit véridique)*, ed. by Paul Imbs, rev. by Jacqueline Cerquiglini-Toulet (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1999), ll. 9002-10.

<sup>26</sup> The observation that amorous poetry in this period is self-conscious in its artifice, particularly shown in its return to the same events, language, and figurations, has been central in scholarship since Daniel Poirion, *Le Poète et le prince: l'évolution du lyrisme courtois de Guillaume de Machaut à Charles d'Orléans* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1965); its most recent important treatment is in Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years' War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), particularly pp. 234-66.

constitutes the world and will eventually come to an end, but as it exists before it has run out. This secular poetry does not take itself seriously, because it has established that serious things do exist elsewhere; it is preserved as a delimited space for play.<sup>27</sup>

#### Morality and Consequence in *Pastoralia*

When Froissart's *persona* wakes up from his love dream and undertakes his repentance in the *Joli buisson* he examines himself in the present and finds that this examination leads him forward to the day of judgement:

En ceste ymagination  
 Fis un peu de collation  
 Contre ma vie et mon affaire  
 Et di je n'eüsse que faire  
 De penser a teles wiseuses,  
 Car ce sont painnes et nuiseuse  
 Pour l'ame, qui noient n'i pense  
 Et qui il faut, en fin de cense,  
 Rendre compte de tous fourfais  
 Que li corps ara dis et fais,  
 Qui n'est que cendre et poureture;  
 Et la bonne ame est noureture  
 De joie et de perfection.

While undertaking this process of imagination I took a short consideration of my life and my conduct, and I said that I had no business thinking of such idle things, for they are things painful and harmful to the soul which thinks nothing of them, and that in the final reckoning it is necessary to give an account of all misdeeds which the body, which is nothing but ashes and rot, will have said and done; and the good soul is the nourishment of joy and of perfection.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For a more thorough discussion of play in poetry in this period, see Glending Olson, *Literature as Recreation in the Later Middle Ages* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), alongside the application of ideas of play to Chaucer's dream visions in Minnis, with Scattergood and Smith, pp. 146-55 and pp. 443-54.

<sup>28</sup> Jean Froissart, *Le Joli buisson de jonece*, ed. by Anthime Fourrier, *Textes litteraires français*, 222 (Geneva: Droz, 1975), ll. 5156-66.



Looking at the present, Froissart's *persona* finds that he has to look forward in time, in contrast to the dream of the past from which he has just awoken: looking at *ma vie et mon affaire* means thinking about what it is worth doing, and this means looking to the account he will have to render at the end of time. His previous fantasy of love and dream of his youth were a deviation in time, a return to a period which is now closed off. In leaving this deviation he reasserts a rational view that time is a linear process, and is shaped by consequence: the present will lead to the future, and that future will be shaped by the deeds undertaken in the present, leaving no reason for a return to a past which cannot be reclaimed and which will not help the attainment of salvation. This was the state Froissart's *persona* occupied at the start of the poem, before his love fantasy:

Si ai je en ce monde aresté  
 .xxxv. ans, peu plus, peu mains,  
 Dont je m'en lo Dieu a jointes mains,  
 Qui m'a amené si avant  
 Et qui me remet au devant  
 Sa nativité, sen enfance,  
 Sa sainte june et sa souffrance,  
 Sa digne resurrection  
 Et s'admirable ascension  
 Et la sentence qu'il fera,  
 Quant cascune et cascuns vera  
 Son jugement cler et ouvert.

I had been in this world for thirty-five years, little more, little less, for which I praise God with joined hands, who had so led me to place again before me his nativity, his infancy, his holy fasting and suffering, his worthy resurrection, and his wondrous ascension, and the sentence he will bring when each woman and each man will see his judgement clear and open.<sup>29</sup>

Froissart's *persona* thanks God that he has given him the grace to see the linear and consequential nature of time clearly: this means looking at the past in so far as it has created the conditions of the present and will shape those of the future. In this state he is not distracted by fantasies about his own youth, which is no longer pertinent to the

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<sup>29</sup> Froissart, *Buisson*, ll. 793-804.

actions he now has to undertake. He has had thirty-five years of life which have led to a situation in which he can, at present, see the shaping force of Christ's life on the world, and is responding to the conditions which it has created as the world tends towards the Day of Judgement. These are the matters to which poetry was shown to have no pertinence in the school curriculum, and they delineate the space in which Froissart's *persona* is not entranced by love, dreaming, or intent on remaining a poet.

Unlike *dits amoureux*, *pastoralia* often do not take an overtly narrative form; the treatises examined in this thesis primarily present points of doctrine and morality in an enumerated *ordinatio partium*.<sup>30</sup> However, this rational arrangement of principles tends to have the effect of directing its audience to an apprehension of their place in the narrative of salvation history. On a very basic level, this is a feature of Christian doctrine. Alastair Minnis has observed that there was a fundamental contradiction in medieval university thought about the relationship between philosophy and theology:

The trouble with theology (as disclosed by the exegesis of its major professionals) was that it seemed to proceed in a way which is "poetic or historical or parabolical", and such methods are not appropriate to any human art or science "which operates by means of the comprehension of human reason" [...] In this case medieval scholars managed to think in compartments, thereby preventing their different systems of valuation from coming into direct confrontation. Poetry and rhetorical discourse continued to be demoted within the *Organon*, even as they were promoted within scholastic accounts of Scriptural style and textual structure.<sup>31</sup>

This compartmentalisation was necessary in a university setting, but the modes of instruction pursued outside the university in the *pastoralia* considered in this thesis

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<sup>30</sup> For *ordinatio* as a demonstration of the rationally interconnected parts of a treatise, see M. B. Parkes, 'The Influence of the Concepts of *Ordinatio* and *Compilatio* on the Development of the Book', in *Medieval Learning and Literature: Essays Presented to Richard William Hunt*, ed. by Jonathan Alexander and Margaret Gibson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), pp. 115-41.

<sup>31</sup> Minnis, *Theory of Authorship*, pp. xv-xvi, quoting Alexander of Hales, *Summa alexandri*, Introduction 1. 4. 1, trans. in Alastair J. Minnis, A. Brian Scott, and David Wallace, *Medieval Literary Theory and Criticism c. 1100-c. 1375: The Commentary Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), pp. 212-15.

often arrange their principles according to reason, but in a fashion which adumbrates this use of human reason as a participation in the historical, narrative process at the heart of Christian theology. This occurs when in the common practice of teaching the Apostles' Creed as the Twelve Articles of Faith, one of the rudiments which parish priests were required to teach their flock:

1. Credo in Deum Patrem omnipotentem, Creatorem caeli et terrae,
  2. et in Iesum Christum, Filium Eius unicum, Dominum nostrum,
  3. qui conceptus est de Spiritu Sancto, natus ex Maria Virgine,
  4. passus sub Pontio Pilato, crucifixus, mortuus, et sepultus,
  5. descendit ad inferos,
  6. tertia die resurrexit a mortuis,
  7. ascendit ad caelos, sedet ad dexteram Patris omnipotentis,
  8. inde venturus est iudicare vivos et mortuos.
  9. Credo in Spiritum Sanctum,
  10. sanctam Ecclesiam catholicam, sanctorum communionem,
  11. remissionem peccatorum,
  12. carnis resurrectionem, vitam aeternam.
- Amen.

1. I believe in God the Father almighty, creator of heaven and earth,
  2. and in Jesus Christ, his only Son, Our Lord,
  3. who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary,
  4. suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried,
  5. he descended into hell,
  6. he rose on the third day,
  7. he ascended into heaven, he is seated at the right hand of the Father,
  8. whence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.
  9. I believe in the Holy Spirit,
  10. the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints,
  11. the remission of sins,
  12. the resurrection of the flesh, the life eternal.
- Amen.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> *Catechismus catholicae ecclesiae*, The Holy See, <[http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism\\_lt/index\\_lt.htm](http://www.vatican.va/archive/catechism_lt/index_lt.htm)> [accessed 20 April 2021], 3. 2. 3; enumeration imposed from [Frère] Laurent, *La Somme le roi*, ed. by Édith Brayer and Anne-Françoise Leurquin-Labie (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 2008), pp. 107-11. For the influential first set of episcopal statutes on parish education see 'Statutes of Archbishop Stephen Langton for the Diocese of Canterbury', in *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church II, A.D. 1205-1313*, ed. by F. M. Powicke and C. R. Cheney, 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964), I. 23-36. For the development of these statutes and the education they shaped on both sides of the English Channel see Andrew Reeves, *Religious Education in Thirteenth-Century England: The Creed and the Articles of Faith*, Education and Society in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, 50 (Leiden: Brill, 2015). For the importance of these statutes in the formation of *pastoralia*, see E. J. Arnould, *Le*

This is at once a set of principles and a narrative, and this matters because the narrative is fixated on the present. In the sequence ‘ascendit ad caelos, sedet ad dexteram Patris omnipotentis, inde venturus est iudicare vivos et mortuos’ the creed finishes its course – it has narrated creation, redemption, and judgement. But its use of the future participle maintains that this last sequence has not yet occurred. The remaining sequence, ‘Credo in Spiritum Sanctum, sanctam Ecclesiam catholicam, sanctorum communionem, remissionem peccatorum, carnis resurrectionem, vitam aeternam’, brings attention back to the present as the time in which actions are being undertaken which will shape the coming resolution in the Last Judgement.

*Pastoralia* tend to adopt this mode of attention to the present as a space in which the remainder of salvation history’s narrative is being shaped, and in which it is urgent that they provide the instruction in doctrine which they offer to their audience. The *Somme le roi*, one of the most widely influential texts on both sides of the Channel, starts its course of instruction with the narrative foundations of Christian morality.<sup>33</sup> It

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*Manuel des péchés: étude de littérature religieuse anglo-normande* (Paris: Droz, 1940), with the broader perspective provided by Leonard E. Boyle, ‘The Fourth Lateran Council and Manuals of Popular Theology’, in *The Popular Literature of Medieval England*, ed. by Thomas J. Heffernan, Tennessee Studies in Literature, 28 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1985), pp. 30-43, and Leonard E. Boyle, ‘The Inter-Conciliar Period 1179-1215 and the Beginnings of Pastoral Manuals’, in *Miscellanea, Rolando Bandinelli, Papa Alessandro III*, ed. by Filippo Liota (Siena: Accademia Sienese degli intronati, 1986), pp. 45-56. These studies are complemented by the remarkable outline of the parity between the bishop as a model of regulation and the regulatory impulse of *pastoralia* as it developed in thirteenth-century England in Paul Binski, *Becket’s Crown: Art and Imagination in Gothic England 1170-1300* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), pp. 179-205.

<sup>33</sup> See Édith Brayer and Anne-Françoise Leurquin-Labie, Introduction to [Frère] Laurent, *La Somme le roi*, ed. by Édith Brayer and Anne-Françoise Leurquin-Labie (Paris: Société des anciens textes français, 2008), pp. 9-82. See also Jessica Berenbeim, ‘An English Manuscript of the *Somme le roi*: Cambridge, St John’s College, MS S. 30’, in *The Cambridge Illuminations: The Conference Papers*, ed. by Stella Panayotova (London: Miller, 2007), pp. 97-103, and Jenny Stratford, ‘*La Somme le roi* (Reims, Bibliothèque municipale, MS 570), the Manuscripts of Thomas of Woodstock, Duke of Gloucester, and the Scribe, John Upton’, in *Le Statut du scripteur au moyen âge: actes du xii<sup>e</sup> colloque scientifique du Comité international de paléographie latine (Cluny, 17-20 juillet 1998)*, ed. by Marie-Clothilde Hubert, Emmanuel Poulle, and Marc H. Smith,

enumerates the Ten Commandments, the basic foundation of virtue which is violated in sin, followed by the Twelve Articles, the Christian narrative which works redemption. It then proceeds to treat the Seven Deadly Sins with their species, the superiority of virtue to all other things, the Seven Petitions of the Pater Noster, the seven cardinal and theological virtues, and the Seven Virtues and their species which oppose the Seven Deadly Sins, each instilled by one of the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The most sustained sections of the *Somme* are those which treat the Seven Deadly Sins and the Seven Virtues which oppose them, provided by the Seven Gifts of the Spirit; the *Somme* is predominately a book of vices and virtues. As it enters its treatment of the first of these remedial virtues, humility against pride, it describes how it is provided by the Spirit's gift of fear. Fear proves to be a gift of narrative awareness:

Ces .iiii. demandes fet li Sainz Esperiz au pecheur quant il l'esvoille et il le resuscite et li euvre les ieuz dou cuer et li rent son sens et son memoire. <<Ou es tu?>> [...] <<Dont viens tu?>> [...] <<Que fes tu?>> [...] <<Ou vas tu?>>

The Holy Spirit asks these four questions of the sinner when he wakes him and arouses him and opens the eyes of his heart and gives him his sense and his memory. "Where are you?" [...] "Where have you come from?" [...] "What are you doing?" [...] "Where are you going?"<sup>34</sup>

The differentiation of virtue from sin is shown to emerge from a realisation of narrative continuity: that the past has shaped the present and the present will shape the future as the world heads towards the Day of Judgement. In this process the past is addressed as the question between 'Where are you?' and 'What are you doing?'; it is of importance only in so far as it has created the present, and conditions the decision which is to be made in the present regarding preparation for the future. Time is a linear progression, and moral responsibility involves a recognition of this fact and action which is based on

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Matériaux pour l'histoire publiés par l'École des chartes, 2 (Paris: École des chartes, 2000), pp. 267-82.

<sup>34</sup> Laurent, p. 239.

it. The same presentation of fear – this time along with shame – occurs at the start of the Recluse of Molliens' widely circulated *Roman de miserere*, another examination of the virtues in opposition to the vices:

Hom, or entent e me respont  
 De trois choses, se tu ses dont  
 Tu venis, ou iés, ou iras.  
 Et après repense en parfont  
 Trois autres, ki a savoir font:  
 Ke fu, ke iés et ke seras.  
 Or sai je bien, s'entendu m'as,  
 De peür et de honte iés mas;  
 Honte et peürs ensemble i sont.

Man, now listen and reply to me regarding three things, if you know whence you have come, where you are, where you are going. And afterwards reconsider deeply three other things, which are worth knowing: what you were, what you are, and what you will be. Now I know indeed, if you have understood me, that you have more fear and shame; shame and fear are there together.<sup>35</sup>

In this case it is assumed that the events of the past will have been insufficient to grant any sense of security in a present which has to take account of God's judgement; moral consequence is opened as a matter for the present and the future. Having attempted to provoke fear – the realisation of moral consequence in the narrative of salvation history – these treatises provide a remedy for the situation that fear is supposed to recognise in their doctrinal and moral precepts. The final virtue in the *Somme* is Measure, the remedy to Gluttony, which leads to perfect peace in God. This is not fully achievable on earth and will reach its consummation in God:

Mes ceste beneurté sera parfete quant il seront en pesible possession de l'eritage leur Pere, c'est dou roiaume dou ciel, ou il seront en pes seure et en pes parfete, la ou toz desirriers seront acompli, la ou ne porra estre ne mal ne douleur ne aversité ne defaute, mes habundance et plentes de touz biens et joie et gloire senz fin.

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<sup>35</sup> Recluse of Molliens, *Li Romans de miserere*, in *Li Romans de carité et miserere*, ed. by A. - G. van Hamel, 2 vols, Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes études, sciences, philologues et historiques, 61-62 (Paris: Vieweg, 1885), II. 133-285 (stanza 8).

But this blessedness will be perfect, when [the peacemakers, who will be called Sons of God] will be in peaceful possession of their Father's heritage, that is of the kingdom of heaven, where they will be in sure peace and in perfect peace, there where all desires will be fulfilled, there where they can be no ill nor sorrow nor adversity nor lack, but abundance and plenty of all good things and joy and glory without end.<sup>36</sup>

This ending sees the final point of virtue as a state of perfect stability, in which narrative will not be necessary anymore because it is a state that lasts forever. The *Roman de miserere* again follows the *Somme* in this respect but acknowledges more fully that this state is not comprehensible before it has been attained. It ends in prayer to the Virgin Mary, the mirror of this state who is able to grant people on earth an apprehension of what it might be to see God:

O mireours vrais d'onesté,  
O dame de grant poesté,  
Rent as caitis lor hiretage!

[...]

Fai nous uel a uel, sans ombrage,  
Fache a fache, non par image  
Ten fil veoir en majesté!  
Amen.

O true mirror of honesty, O lady of great power, grant the wretched their inheritance! [...] Make us equal to equal, without shade, face to face, not in a reflection, see your son in majesty!  
Amen.<sup>37</sup>

It is significant that these treatises bring their audience towards this state from the middle of the world and the middle of sin in which they find themselves – that they occupy the place of the Creed's 'Credo in Spiritum Sanctum, sanctam Ecclesiam catholicam, sanctorum communionem, remissionem peccatorum'. This reaches its height in Peter d'Abernon of Feucham's *Lumere as lais*, a long Anglo-Norman verse

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<sup>36</sup> Laurent, p. 395.

<sup>37</sup> Recluse, *Miserere*, stanza 273.

treatise which enjoyed a substantial circulation in fourteenth-century England, surviving in more than twenty manuscripts produced between the late thirteenth century and the fourteenth century.<sup>38</sup> The *Lumere* takes the form of a dialogue between a master and pupil which aims to impart a comprehensive scheme of religious instruction drawn primarily from Honorius Augustodunensis' *Elucidarium* and, with unusual ambition, Peter Lombard's *Sentences*. This dialogue is arranged into distinctions ordered by rational categories in six books, treating God, his creatures, the sins, Jesus Christ, the sacraments, and the Day of Judgement. The treatise opens with an extended prayer which takes the form of an abbreviated version of salvation history up to the present. When he reaches the present, Peter ends the prayer and turns to an academic prologue based on the Aristotelian four causes.<sup>39</sup> This prologue opens with the scriptural text of Proverbs 14:12: 'est via quae videtur homini iusta novissima autem eius deducunt ad mortem' ('There is a way which seems just to men, but its ending leads them down to death'). Peter considers life to be the way, which could lead to death or not, and his treatise to be a version of that way which stands in opposition to false teachers who lead their students to death:

Cest siecle n'est fur un veage  
 Solum les seinz, e checun sage  
 Le veit bien, e put demustrer,  
 Kar ici ne poum pas demurer.  
 Le ciel est nostre dreit pais  
 Ke Jhesu Crist nus ad cunquis,  
 Dunt si nus volum la venir,  
 La dreite veie covient tenir.

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<sup>38</sup> Peter's name is a matter of some uncertainty - see Glynn Hesketh, Introduction to Peter [Pierre] d'Abernon of Fetcham, *Lumere as lais*, ed. by Glynn Hesketh, 3 vols, Anglo-Norman Text Society, 54-58 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1996-2000), III (2000), 1-63 (pp. 1-5). Peter will be referred to as 'of Fetcham' as his own declarations of himself as a master under patronage from the d'Abernon family is easily compatible with him being parson of the Surrey village of Fetcham; identification with the civil lawyer Peter of Peckham would demand more evidence.

<sup>39</sup> For the use of Aristotelian causes in academic prologues, see Minnis, *Theory of Authorship*.



This world is nothing but a journey, according to the saints, and every wise person sees this well, and can show it, that we cannot dwell here. Heaven is our rightful country which Jesus Christ has conquered for us, to which – if we want to go there – we need to take the right way.<sup>40</sup>

The present, after salvation history, is a crossroads, and as Peter introduces his treatise to follow on from salvation history in the present, he insists that this is the moment in which his audience can choose to end the story badly or well. This is the second occasion on which he examines a point at which the way in the narrative seems unclear. Earlier, in the course of his prayer on salvation history, he attends to the lack of the prospect of redemption as an insoluble intellectual problem after Adam's fall:

Mes covendreit ke amendé fust  
 Le trespas k'esteit fet el fust.  
 Humme covendreit ke le feit,  
 Mes humme fere nel purreit,  
 Kar meilur de Adam covendreit  
 Ke fust, ki cel chose fereit.  
 Humme nel pot estre pur verité  
 Ki fust en pecché engendré [...]

But it was necessary that it should be amended, the trespass that was made by the tree. It was necessary that a man do it, but no man could do it, for it was necessary that he be better than Adam, he who should do that deed. He could not be a man, in truth, who was engendered in sin [...]<sup>41</sup>

The solution to this intellectual problem impeding the narrative's progress was, of course, Jesus, and Peter's use of Proverbs 14:12 when he reaches the present in salvation history invites the same solution – he could have invoked John 14:5-6:

dicit ei Thomas Domine nescimus quo vadis et quomodo possumus viam scire  
 dicit ei Iesus ego sum via et veritas et vita nemo venit ad Patrem nisi per me

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<sup>40</sup> Peter [Pierre] d'Abernon of Fetcham, *Lumere as lais*, ed. by Glynn Hesketh, 3 vols, Anglo-Norman Text Society, 54-58 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1996-2000), I (1996), 421-28.

<sup>41</sup> Peter of Fetcham, *Lumere*, I (1996), 247-54.

Thomas said to him: Lord, we do not know where you are going: and how can we know the way?

Jesus said to him: I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.

It is likely that Peter had this passage in mind, but he goes further and uses the structure of the Aristotelian prologue as a way of asserting that Jesus as the way to life is the same thing as his treatise. Jesus is all four of its Aristotelian causes: the *causa efficiens* (Peter himself is, of course, only a secondary *causa efficiens*), the *causa materialis*, and the *causa finalis*,<sup>42</sup> Peter presents the *causa formalis* as the *forma tractatus*, the six books on God, his creatures, sin, Jesus Christ, the sacraments, and the judgement; in itself this forms a narrative of salvation history from start to finish, a *progressus et recessus* from and to God in Christ. Every cause of the treatise is Jesus; its entire action is God operating with creation to lead it back to him. This means that the treatise is the middle of a process, the point which Claire Waters has recently aligned with the situation of thirteenth-century religious instruction.<sup>43</sup> Jesus is working in the present to lead the story on as he did in the earlier narrative impasse, to reach the stability of God through contemplation of himself. The first lines of the *Lumere* turn to this God who fills all time, and who will do so in the treatise itself:

Vera Deu omnipotent,  
 K'estes fin e commencement  
 De tutte les choses k'en siecle sunt  
 E k'avant furent e après serunt.

True God almighty, who art the end and the beginning of all the things that are in the world and were before and will be after.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> See Peter of Fetcham, *Lumere*, I (1996), 537-42, 553-60, and 639-42 respectively.

<sup>43</sup> See Claire Waters, *Translating 'Clergie': Status, Education, and Salvation in Thirteenth-Century Vernacular Texts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

<sup>44</sup> Peter of Fetcham, *Lumere*, I (1996), 1-4.

This is an extreme alignment of the course of a treatise with the course of salvation history, but it amplifies a premise which is implicit throughout the offering of moral guidance in *pastoralia*. Where *dits amoureux* deliberately recede from the ‘Quo tendit’ which renders Pseustis silent in the *Eclogue* of Theodulus, *pastoralia* present their task as the way to accede to Christian authority, and in doing so aspire to be both the way and the destination.

### Reconciling the *Dits amoureux* and *Pastoralia*

*Dits amoureux* and *pastoralia* treat narrative in contrasting ways, but their approaches do make contact with one another. One motif often employed by *dits amoureux* is to attend to moral context for some time, before setting it aside to enter the state of play which prevails within the narrative frame. Prior to the *persona*'s repentance, this clearly occurs in Froissart's *Joli buisson*, which opens with its narrator in bed in winter, thinking on his responsible life in middle age, before he returns to look on the image of his beloved and enters the framed space of his dream of youth. It also takes place in Machaut's *Jugement du roy de Navarre*: Machaut's *persona* considers the iniquity of the world, sees it punished by famine and plague, and hides in his house and prepares to die. The situation is abruptly alleviated when he is informed by a friend that the plague has passed. Divine punishment is postponed:

Je n'os mie cuer esperdu,  
 Eins repris tantost ma maniere  
 Et ouvri mes yex et ma chiere  
 Devers l'air qui si dous estoit  
 Et si clers qu'il m'amonnestoit  
 Que lors ississe de prison  
 Ou j'avoie esté la saison.

I had not lost my heart, but took back all of my bearing and opened my eyes and my face to the air that was so sweet and clear that it ordered me to leave my prison, where I had been all that season.<sup>45</sup>

God's wrath is given a time – a season – in the poem and then set aside; Machaut's *persona* returns to just (*tantost*) how he was before it was revealed and does not need to undergo any process of self-examination or alteration. Instead, the narrative proceeds to see him venture out into the sunny world and encounter a lady who eventually proves to be Bonneüirté (Happiness), be confronted with the playful sin of having come to the wrong conclusion to the *demande d'amour* in his earlier *Jugement du roy de Behaigne*, and have to undertake the light penance of composing more love poetry. J. M. Moreau has attempted to mitigate the starkness of this deviation, suggesting that the encounter with Bonneüirté is laced with the demands for a quieter, inter-personal piety which makes reference to the complications of Machaut's own negotiation between his patrons; more convincingly, Alastair Minnis has examined this levity to suggest a wider inclination in the *dits amoureux* to draw their audience away from the demands of piety, and instead situate their narratives in the contemporary medical context of the potential for stories and poetry to alleviate melancholy and ease the conduct of life in the world.<sup>46</sup> Minnis' study is insightful and broadly true, but the change of context it proffers can be reversed: as the *Joli buisson* shows, a mental state which might be taken as pathological melancholy in a medical context can become the fear which leads to salvation in the context of *pastoralia*, and be met with the contrasting narrative treatment of self-examination in the light of a continuous progression of time from the present to the Day of Judgement. Machaut's *Jugement de Navarre* plays on this possibility by setting up

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<sup>45</sup> Guillaume de Machaut, *Le Jugement dou roy de Navarre*, in *Guillaume de Machaut: The Complete Poetry and Music*, ed. by R. Barton Palmer et al., 13 vols (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2016-), I (2016), <<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/guillaume-de-machaut-complete-poetry-and-music-volume1>> [accessed 20 April 2021], ll. 480-86.

<sup>46</sup> See Moreau, pp. 102-43, and Minnis with Scattergood and Smith, pp. 146-55.

conditions which invite penance, but which pass with a change in the environment and in the mood of Machaut's *persona*; in doing so it acknowledges that in another situation the penitential response to such events would be required instead.

The secular narrative approach taken in *dits amoureux* has a religious edge; it is aware that it is setting aside the demands of eternity, and that they are due to be addressed outside the poem's space for play. Machaut and Froissart were both clerks in holy orders. While Machaut did not compose a final *dit amoureux* to mark his transition to a state of spiritual maturity as Froissart did in the *Joli buisson*, he did compose liturgical music, *lais* of Marian devotion, a compilation of *exempla* to console the imprisoned Charles II of Navarre (the *Confort d'ami*), a chronicle commemorating the crusade of Peter of Cyprus (the *Prise d'Alexandrie*), and motets which set amorous verse in dialogue with Latin liturgy.<sup>47</sup> The composers of *dits amoureux* were demonstrably invested in moral consequence outside the *dits* themselves; this is why their employment of the narrative frame in the *dits* is significant.

In turn, *pastoralia* are invested in the presence of forms of literature which do not address moral consequence or lead to the fulfilment of salvation. A common motif sees treatises open with a list of the vain reading which distracts people from the moral demands of the present, and which they aim to replace. Robert of Greatham's *Miroir*, an Anglo-Norman collection of Sunday Gospel lections and accompanying homilies, directly rebukes its patron, Helen de Quincy:

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<sup>47</sup> Much of Machaut's devotional work remains unedited; the forthcoming *Guillaume de Machaut: The Complete Poetry and Music*, ed. by R. Barton Palmer et al., volume XIII, on *The Mass and Other Religious Works*, is due to remedy this.

Madame, bien l'ai oi dire  
 Ke mult amez oir e lire  
 Chancon de geste e d'estoire  
 E mult i metez la memoire.  
 Mais bien uoil que vus sachez  
 Que co est plus ke uanitez,  
 Kar co n'est rien fors controuure  
 E folie de uaine cure.

My lady, I've often heard it said that you greatly enjoy hearing and reading songs about deeds and history, and often set your memory to them. But I dearly want you to know that that is more than vanity, for it is nothing but the contrivance and error of empty care.<sup>48</sup>

Similar passages can be found in other treatises, including Denis Piramus' *Vie seint Edmund le rei*, Chardri's *Vie des set dormanz*, and, at great length, in the *Cursor mundi*.

This motif has received detailed attention in Daniel Reeve's unpublished doctoral thesis, with particular attention to the intensity with which religious treatises and romances claimed to compete for the same mode of attention from their audience.<sup>49</sup>

Robert Manning of Brunne supplemented the *Manuel des péchés* with such a passage, presumably feeling that it was a feature lacking from the French text:

For many ben of swyche manere,  
 Pat talys and rymys wyl bleþly here;  
 Yn gamys, & festys, & at þe ale,  
 Loue men to lestene trotëuale:  
 Pat may falle ofte to vylanye,

<sup>48</sup> Robert of Greatham, *The Anglo-Norman Miroir*, ed. by Thomas G. Duncan and Margaret Connolly, in *The Middle English Mirror: Sermons from Advent to Sexagesima*, Middle English Texts, 34 (Heidelberg: Winter, 2003), ll. 3-10. For Helen as the *Aline* Robert addresses in the prologue to the *Miroir*, see K. V. Sinclair, 'The Anglo-Norman Patrons of Robert the Chaplain and Robert of Greatham', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 28. 3 (1992), 193-208, and K. V. Sinclair, Introduction to Robert le chapelain [of Greatham], *Corset*, ed. by K. V. Sinclair, Anglo-Norman Text Society, 52 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1995), pp. 1-39. For details of Helen's male relatives, see Richard D. Oram, 'Quincy, Roger de, Earl of Winchester (c. 1195-1264)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (23<sup>rd</sup> September 2004), <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/22966>> [accessed 21 April 2021], and T. F. Tout and R. R. Davies, 'Zouche [Zouch], Alan de la (d. 1270)', Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (23<sup>rd</sup> September 2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30300>> [accessed 21 April 2021].

<sup>49</sup> See Daniel Reeve, 'Romance and the Literature of Religious Instruction, c. 1170-c. 1330' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2014), pp. 9-36.

To dedly synne, or oþer folye;  
 For swyche men haue y made þis ryme  
 Pat þey may weyl dyspende here tyme,  
 And þere-yn sumwhat for to here,  
 To leue al swychë foul manere,  
 And for to kunnë knowe þerynne  
 Pat þey wene no synne be ynne.<sup>50</sup>

The motif admits a parity between the religious treatise and profane works; Reeve, for instance, draws attention to the way in which Chardri aligns the composers of profane literature with the persecutors of the Seven Sleepers, whom he depicts as heretics rather than pagans.<sup>51</sup> In contrast to the *Lumere*'s assertion of divine action through its text, the motif does not logically separate the treatise it introduces as a work of divine authorship and holy intervention; it suggests instead that the treatise and profane literature are likely to appear similar, and that the virtue to be attained in attending to *pastoralia* is worked out in the face of a temptation to avoid the demands of salvation history and retreat into other narratives which do not admit them. In both of the cases quoted here, it claims that there is an existing problem – the treatise's audience are already listening to vain things in the time they have to spare – and that this is due to the distinct appeal of narrative outside salvation history. The treatise will replace that with an attention to the linear narrative of salvation, but this is not framed as a great act in itself as much as a remedy for the sheer appeal of isolated, inconsequential narratives.

This contact between the approaches to narrative taken by *dits amoureux* and *pastoralia* is nonetheless not substantial enough to facilitate the composition of both by the same writer. While *dits amoureux* do recognise the existence of a religious field of action beyond their own narrative, they do not leave space for another text by the same

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<sup>50</sup> Robert Manning of Brunne, *Robert of Brunne's Handlyng Synne*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall, 2 vols, Early English Text Society, Original Series 119 and 123 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1901-03), I (1901), 45-56; compare to *Le Manuel de pechiez*, ed. by D. W. Russell, 3 vols, Anglo-Norman Text Society 75-77 (Oxford: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2019-), I (2019), 1-104.

<sup>51</sup> Reeve, p. 18.

writer to assert the urgency of salvation history as a single narrative with a bearing on the present. Assuming that both texts are taken seriously, this compromises the ability of the narrative frame in a *dit amoureux* to hold salvation history at bay; it places an unsustainable pressure on the narrative frame.

This can be seen by examining John Clanvowe's two surviving works, the *Book of Cupid* and the *Two Ways*.<sup>52</sup> The *Book of Cupid* takes up the attention to distortion found in the *dits amoureux*: its narrator is in love and experiences the main part of the narrative, the debate between a nightingale and cuckoo about the good of being in love, in a reverie between sleep and waking. He forces the result of the debate, driving away the cuckoo with a stone because he finds it to be the less gentle bird due its unpleasant song and its objection that love is an irrational state of suffering; his actions are underpinned by the fact that he is in love and therefore cannot make the determination that love is not irrational. The poem ends with the prospect of the debate continuing, and the prospect of more poetry, as the nightingale asks the birds to hear his complaint against the cuckoo at their parliament on the next St Valentine's Day. This narrative is protected from the demands of moral consequence by the fact that the narrator encounters it in a reverie from which he wakes at the end; and that the poem presents the God of Love's power on devotional terms which admit that he is presented as a parody of the real God, to be observed in actual religious practice outside the poem: 'He can bynde and vnbynde eke, | What he wole haue bounde and vnbounde' (*BC*, ll. 9-10); 'I prey to God he alwey with her be [...] And shilde vs fro the cukkow and his lore' (*BC*, ll. 246-47); 'And loke alwey that thou be good and trewe, | And I wol singe oon of thy songes newe' (*BC*, ll. 259-60). The *Two Ways* urges its audience to see that they stand

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<sup>52</sup> Scholarly consensus holds that John Clanvowe composed the *Book of Cupid*, over the possibility that it was composed by the younger Thomas Clanvowe; see the landmark study V. J. Scattergood, 'The Authorship of *The Boke of Cupide*', *Anglia*, 82. 2 (1964), 137-49.



at the junction of two ways in the present, the way of obedience to God's commandments and the way of disobedience:

And, þerfore, it weer ful good þat we shoopen vs for to eschewe þat broode way and for to goo in that nargh wey, ffor we been euery day goyng ful faste towardis anoþer place and we wyten neuere how soone we shuln out of þis world.

(*TW*, p. 57).

It concludes that the way of obedience, through resistance to the devil, the world, and the flesh, love of God and your neighbour as yourself, is the most reasonable, delightful, and profitable thing to exist. This reaches a state of unsurpassable stability, the end to any narrative conceivable:

It is profitable to loue God abouen alle oothere þinges and oure neiþebour as oure self, for he þat dooþ so shalle haue þe blisse of heuene þat euere shal laste. And þat is þe althergrettete profit þat may bee.

(*TW*, p. 78).

The *Book of Cupid* relies on the carefully posed possibility that its narrator could be completely deluded. When he drives away the cuckoo, we are told:

And euermore the cukkow as he fley,  
He seyde, "Farewel, farewel, papyngay."  
As thogh he had scorned, thoghte me.  
But ay I hunted him fro tre to tre,  
Till he was fer al out of sight away.

(*BC*, ll. 221-25)

This stanza rests heavily on the words 'thoghte me': they qualify the narrator's explanation of what the allegation that he is a parrot of the nightingale's position meant to him. The following 'But' initially promises to contradict this hint of uncertainty, as it introduces the narrator's determined pursuit of the cuckoo to defend his position; however, this action seems just as likely to suggest that the cuckoo has touched a nerve as that the narrator feels secure in his championing of the nightingale over the cuckoo. Lee Patterson has pursued this possibility with particular assiduity, reading the cuckoo's

cry of *papyngay* as the heart of the poem, with the suggestion that it bespeaks a disquiet with the standing of poetry in a tyrannical Ricardian court.<sup>53</sup> Without going as far as Patterson's inference, an audience is likely to concentrate on the *papyngay* cry because it is surrounded by the ambiguity which constitutes the poem's world. The conventions of the *dits amoureux* ensure that an audience is not surprised by Clanvowe's *persona*'s dedication to amorous love over all alternatives, and the narrative frame ensures that this does not really have wider moral implications; it is left to be a condition of the poem's play that the merit of the nightingale's case and the good of the narrator's allegiance to it are open to question. This leaves space for the suggestion that the *persona* could be misled by the God of Love and the nightingale, and that the cuckoo could be the voice of divine reason, without the prospect of that being fulfilled; the play emerges in this space for speculation without consequence. Should an audience take the *Two Ways* seriously alongside this, however, it is clear that the narrator has no sensible choice other than to listen to the cuckoo. The flesh urges people to disobey God's commandments against reason:

Ȝef we shuln in at þe strayte Ȝaate we musten keepe oure flessh in right reule as men keepen a seek man þat is disposed to fallen into woodnesse, hoopynge to bryngen hym to heele. ffor oure flessh hath alwey þat seeknesse þat he is disposed to be woode Ȝef þat he haue al þat he desireth.

(*TW*, p. 66)

It is clear that narrator's position is shaped by his flesh:

For al thogh I be olde and vnlusty,  
Yet haue I felt of that sekenes in May  
Bothe hote and colde, an accesse euery day,  
How sore ywis ther wot no wight but I.

(*BC*, ll. 37-40)

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<sup>53</sup> See Lee Patterson, 'Court Politics and the Invention of Literature: The Case of Sir John Clanvowe', in *Culture and History, 1350-1600: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing*, ed. by David Aers (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), pp. 7-41.

Moreover, there can be no bad consequence from the narrator leaving the nightingale and the God of Love for reason because a reasonable adherence to the narrow way of God's commandments can only lead to the stability of the highest profit available. In these circumstances, the narrative frame does not stand: it does not matter if the narrator's reverie is a state he still occupies or not, because it is urgent that we pursue salvation and clear that one way through the narrative is likely to lead there.

The logical conclusion of this is a reading that pre-empts the exegetical criticism of the mid-twentieth century: the entire *Book of Cupid* is a book of cupidity which the righteous Clanvowe has composed ironically and requires an audience to see through.<sup>54</sup> The price of this reading is that much of the poem becomes redundant. The opening of the poem balances genuine awe at the power of amorous love with an awareness that it is speaking in terms which are parodic of religious devotion:

The god of love, a! benedicite,  
How myghty and how grete a lorde is he!  
For he can make of lowe hertys hie,  
And highe lowe, and like for to die  
And herde hertis he can make fre.

(BC, ll. 1-5)

No part of this balance gives away its position; it could be a theological parody which is genuinely reverent towards amorous love, or it could be the voice of one jaded and weary with the power of falling in love. In either case, a reading which takes the demands of the *Two Ways* seriously would have to assume that this can only be a withering sarcasm which hints that reverence of falling in love is put in the place of reverence for God by its devotees, in order to indicate that such service of the flesh is

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<sup>54</sup> The *locus classicus* of this approach is, of course, D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962); for the application of an exegetical approach to the Clanvowe's *Book of Cupid*, see David Chamberlain, 'Clanvowe's Cuckoo', in *New Readings of Late Medieval Love Poems*, ed. by David Chamberlain (Lanham: University Press of America, 1993), pp. 41-66.

blasphemy. This is a limiting reading, and one that returns to Pseustis' problem in the *Eclogue* of Theodulus: when the narrative frame cannot stand to hold salvation history at bay, then the poem has to have its figures deciphered into truths which can stand in relation to eternity. This entails reducing it to tenets which are already available in the *Two Ways*. As in the *Eclogue*, it becomes unclear what good poetry's figuration actually does when the truth which it figures is available more fully elsewhere. Not only is the complexity of the *Book of Cupid* reduced in this reading, it becomes unclear why the *Book of Cupid* should exist at all.

In Clanvowe's case, it would not be hard for a fourteenth- or fifteenth-century audience to resolve this problem. Clanvowe appears to have composed the *Two Ways* shortly before his death in Constantinople, on the way to the Holy Land, and it was brought back to England with his retinue. This is stated at the start of the only surviving copy to preserve the beginning of the text, in Oxford, University College MS 97: 'This tretis next folewyngge maade Sir Johan Clanevowe, knyzt, þe laste viage þat he maade ouer the greete see in whiche he dyede, of whos soul Ihesu haue mercy. Amen' (*TW*, p. 57).<sup>55</sup> These are ideal circumstances for a resolution based on a biographical narrative of repentance: any contradiction between the demands of the *Book of Cupid* and the *Two Ways* can be resolved by the understanding that it is clear that he died in a state of devotion and his treatise reflects that. There is no evidence that anyone read these two texts in close proximity before their publication in modern editions; they have entirely separate manuscript traditions. However, this mode of reconciliation was the approach

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<sup>55</sup> For attention to the circumstances of Clanvowe's death and the delivery of the treatise to England, see V. J. Scattergood, 'The Date of Sir John Clanvowe's *The Two Ways* and the "Reinvention of Lollardy"', *Medium Ævum* 79. 1 (2010), 116-20; for closer attention to Clanvowe's death and remarkable burial alongside his companion William Neville, see Siegrid Düll, Maurice Keen, and Anthony Luttrell, 'Faithful unto Death: The Tomb Slab of Sir William Neville and Sir John Clanvowe, Constantinople, 1391', *Antiquaries Journal*, 71 (1991), 174-90.

firmly established in the *accessus* tradition to Ovid and would have been available to anyone in contact with grammar school education. This mode of resolution was not available to Chaucer or Gower, who also composed both poetry derived from the *dits amoureux* and *pastoralia*. They worked on the contradictory approaches to narrative demanded by these traditions throughout their careers, and eventually came to reform their narrative frames in response to it.

## Chapter 2

## Moral Poetry: Gower's *Mirour de l'omme* and *Vox clamantis*

Gower is well known for his application of *pastoralia* to the *dits amoureux* tradition. His most celebrated work, the *Confessio amantis*, is a poem which takes the *persona* of a desperate lover, Amans, and sets him before Venus' priest, Genius, to make a confession of his conduct in love arranged according to the Seven Deadly Sins. The *Confessio* shapes the conventions of *dits amoureux* around the traditions of *pastoralia*. However, the *Confessio* was a significant departure from Gower's earlier work, which did not primarily draw on a repertoire of material from *dits amoureux* and was more assertively grounded in *pastoralia*. This chapter examines how Gower spent his early writing career, from the late 1370s to the late 1380s, developing a form of poetry which was dedicated to the elucidation of moral consequence. It establishes that Gower's earliest surviving work, the *Mirour de l'omme*, is best understood as a work of *pastoralia*, and that it appears to have been produced in tandem with the *Vox clamantis* in a search for a moral role for the poet, by means of which he can direct his audience to the demands of salvation history.

While this moral poetry is not directly grounded in the tradition of *dits amoureux*, it does open a dialogue with their poetic practice, and the relationship between that practice and moral consequence. The modes of *pastoralia* and satire which underpin the *Mirour* and the *Vox* both concentrate on examination and reproach of the self. In his adaptation of these modes, Gower presents his speaker as a poet who turns back to a past rooted in love poetry which lacked due attention to moral consequence, through allusion to the *dits amoureux* tradition and the works of Ovid. He presents his

moral poetry as a correction and fulfilment of a wider poetic tradition, and in doing so he adapts and vastly extends the work of the narrative frame from the *dits amoureux*. His entire poetic project frames *dits amoureux* as a morally compromised past state, now corrected by ageing and repentance. This is most fully worked out in the *Visio Anglie* which forms Book I of the *Vox clamantis*, a parodic *dit amoureux* in which Gower's *persona* has a dream which bears moral consequence, breaking into a life of quiescent play; the *persona* occupies a *locus amoenus* typical of *dits amoureux* in his waking state, only to be met with a dream which articulates the threats to his society due to its lack of regard for moral consequence. The engagement with the material of the *dit amoureux* tradition in Gower's early career is sustained and complex, but it is also hesitant. The parody of *Vox clamantis* I remains a *dit amoureux* seen through the lens of moral correction, half an adaptation of the tradition and half its own moral justification for that adaptation.

#### *Pastoralia* in Gower's Early Poetry

Gower's earliest surviving poem, the *Mirour de l'omme*, has troubled scholars who have attempted to categorise it. It is a long poem, with an *ordinatio partium* containing diverse material. It starts with an allegorical narrative on the incestuous origin of Sin and Death, then schematically details the characters of their daughters - the Seven Deadly Sins - who they wed to the World, and sets Seven Virtues against them. It proceeds to examine the promulgation of sin in the world through a comprehensive estates satire, before looking for the origin of sin and finding it in the exercise of every human's free will. Finally, this leads to an account of the speaker's self-examination and repentance for his own sinful poetry, seeking satisfaction in a closing prayer to the Virgin Mary which narrates her role in salvation history. Scholarship on Gower's

French and Latin work has grown in the last decade, but studies which centre on the *Mirour* remain few. Most prominent is the work of R. F. Yeager, who has addressed the poem throughout his career, emphasising its integrity with Gower's wider poetic corpus and its religious seriousness.<sup>1</sup> Recently Andrew Galloway has approached the poem from a different, but complementary, angle by concentrating on its use of classical authorities to articulate social reform in a civic setting, aligning it with what he considers to be the early currents of humanism throughout Europe.<sup>2</sup> While other important direct studies of the poem have been undertaken by Thomas Bestul and Maura Nolan, concentrating on its reception of traditions of meditation and its attention to embodiment in its aesthetics respectively, it has received most other critical attention in the course of studies of wider cultural developments in late fourteenth-century England.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> In particular see R. F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion, Publications of the John Gower Society*, 2 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), pp. 230-79; R. F. Yeager, 'Politics and the French Language in England During the Hundred Years' War: The Case of John Gower', in *Inscribing the Hundred Years' War in French and English Cultures*, ed. by Denise N. Baker (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), pp. 127-57; R. F. Yeager, 'John Gower's French', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2004), pp. 137-51; R. F. Yeager, 'Gower's French Audience: The *Mirour de l'omme*', *Chaucer Review*, 41. 2 (2006), 111-37; and R. F. Yeager, 'John Gower's French and his Readers', in *John Gower: Trilingual Poet*, ed. by Elisabeth M. Dutton, John Hines, and R. F. Yeager, *Westfield Medieval Studies*, 3 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 304-14.

<sup>2</sup> See Andrew Galloway, 'Gower in Striped Sleeves: The *Mirour de l'omme* as Gower's Early Humanism', in *Studies in the Age of Gower: A Festschrift in Honor of R. F. Yeager*, ed. by Susannah Mary Chewning, *Publications of the John Gower Society*, 13 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2020), pp. 119-34.

<sup>3</sup> See Thomas Bestul, 'Gower's *Mirour de l'omme* and the Meditative Tradition', *Mediaevalia*, 16 (1993), 305-28, and Maura Nolan, 'Agency and the Poetics of Sensation in Gower's *Mirour de l'omme*', in *Answerable Style: The Idea of the Literary in Medieval England*, ed. by Frank Grady and Andrew Galloway (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013), pp. 214-43. The *Mirour* is used for evidence of wider social issues in Matthew Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Roger A. Ladd, *Antimerchantism in Late Medieval English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); and Craig E. Bertolet, *Chaucer, Gower, Hoccleve and the Commercial Practices of Late Fourteenth-Century London* (Farnham: Ashgate Press, 2013).



A recurrent feature in this small body of criticism is a tendency towards over-imaginative accounts of the *Mirour*'s development, perhaps due to its length and varied structure. Most prominently, R. F. Yeager has depicted the *Mirour* as a unique attempt to create a cosmological epic which anticipates *Paradise Lost* but struggles under the weight of ambition, and has suggested that its segmented qualities indicate that it was composed in two stretches for two different audiences.<sup>4</sup> In 2000, Yeager suggested that Gower started the *Mirour* between 1356 and 1360 for Edward III's court, an argument which he amended in 2006 with the proposition that work on the poem was interrupted and started again with new priorities in the 1370s for the canons of St Mary Overy in Southwark.<sup>5</sup> This speculative argument is no longer tenable given Martha Carlin's revision of Gower's documentary record, which indicates that he did not move to his property in the precincts of St Mary Overy until the 1380s.<sup>6</sup> However, Maura Nolan and Matthew Giancarlo have both similarly depicted the *Mirour* as a product of a vast and immature ambition which is troubling to read due to the pull between its constituent elements' disparate priorities; in Nolan's case, between Gower's programmatic morality and an investment in an embodied, sensual piety, and in Giancarlo's between the demands of communal co-operation and the spiritual state of the individual penitent.<sup>7</sup>

These approaches over-complicate the *Mirour*: they ignore the poem's clear debt to *pastoralia*, which regularly have a segmented *ordinatio partium* and cosmographic horizons. No scholar has examined the *Mirour* in the context of *pastoralia* since G. C. Macaulay, who recognised in passing that parallels to the *Mirour* could be found in the

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<sup>4</sup> This is most concisely stated in Yeager, 'Gower's French'.

<sup>5</sup> See Yeager, 'Politics and the French Language', pp. 135-40, and Yeager, 'Gower's French Audience: The *Mirour*', pp. 117-25.

<sup>6</sup> See Martha Carlin, 'Gower's Life', in *Historians on John Gower*, ed. by Stephen H. Rigby and Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2019), <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2102306&site=ehost-live>> [accessed 20 April 2021].

<sup>7</sup> See Nolan, 'Agency and the Poetics of Sensation'; Giancarlo, *Parliament and Literature*, pp. 90-128.

*Speculum vitae* or the *Manuel des péchés*.<sup>8</sup> This is despite a thorough study of the schematisation of vices and virtues found throughout Gower's poetry by J. B. Dwyer, which only establishes Gower's debt to the ubiquitous *Somme le roi*, a debt which clearly does not extend to the form of the Anglo-Norman verse *Mirour*.<sup>9</sup> Yeager has recently suggested that the *Manuel des péchés* could have been an influence on the *Mirour* alongside the *Somme*, but only to establish a broad background, the 'poetry of penance', to a more particular claim that Gower was responding to Henry of Lancaster's *Livre des saints medicines* in a shared courtly, lay environment in the late 1350s.<sup>10</sup> This preference for the *Livre* as a context rests on a sharp division which Yeager makes between clerical devotional culture and noble amorous culture, a division against which Catherine Batt specifically cautions in the introduction to her translation of the *Livre*.<sup>11</sup> Broadly, two factors have shaped the neglect of *pastoralia* as a context for the *Mirour*: commentators remain unduly influenced by erroneous ideas about the prevalence of Anglo-Norman French in the second half of the fourteenth century and therefore miss the Anglo-Norman counterparts to the *Mirour*, and they have overlooked the likelihood that the *Mirour* is specifically indebted to the two pastoral treatises composed by the Recluse of Molliens.

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<sup>8</sup> See G. C. Macaulay, Introduction to the French works, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), I (1899), xi-lxxi (pp. xii-xiii).

<sup>9</sup> See J. B. Dwyer, 'Gower's *Mirour* and its French Sources: A Re-Examination of Evidence', *Studies in Philology*, 48. 3 (1951), 482-505, derived from J. B. Dwyer, 'The Tradition of Medieval Manuals of Religious Instruction in the Poems of John Gower, with Special Reference to the Development of the *Book of Virtues*' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1950). The foundational study of the sources of Gower's *Confessio amantis* avoids specifying its debt to *pastoralia* beyond general observation, further obscuring this matter – see H. C. Mainzer, 'A Study of the Sources of the *Confessio amantis* of John Gower' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1967), pp. 13-33.

<sup>10</sup> Yeager, 'Gower's French Audience: The *Mirour*', pp. 112-14.

<sup>11</sup> Catherine Batt, Introduction to Henry of Grosmont, First Duke of Lancaster [Henry of Lancaster], *Le Livre des seyntz medicines/The Book of Holy Medicines*, trans. by Catherine Batt, French of England Translation Series, 8 (Tempe: Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2014), pp. 1-66 (pp. 5-17).

Long works of *pastoralia* in Anglo-Norman French, like the *Manuel des péchiés* and the *Lumere as lais*, are the closest parallels to the *Mirour* according to the basic criteria of scale, dialect, and *ordinatio*. Their proximity to the *Mirour* has been obscured by a limited apprehension of philological, historical, or linguistic scholarship on the place of Anglo-Norman French in fourteenth-century England. This takes a particularly extreme form in R. F. Yeager's re-dating of Gower's initial work on the *Mirour* from the late 1370s to the late 1350s, long before any other evidence suggests that Gower was writing, based on an understanding that the poem's French would have appeared old-fashioned close to the 1362 Statute of Pleading, and can be best understood as a cultural counterpart to Edward III's ambitions for the French throne and subsequent hosting of major French aristocrats as prisoners at his court.<sup>12</sup> The most obvious problem with this position is that it does not account for the distinctly insular qualities of the dialect of French Gower uses, which have been detailed in work by Brian Merrilees and Heather Pagan, Ian Short, and Richard Ingham.<sup>13</sup> Further to this, Andrea Ruddick's thorough study of English national identity in the fourteenth century unequivocally finds that the use of French was not generally perceived to be a threat to English identity in this period, despite contemporary xenophobic rhetoric which grounds its claims in the need for defence of the English language.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Yeager, 'Politics and the French Language', pp. 135-40.

<sup>13</sup> See Brian Merrilees, and Heather Pagan, 'John Barton, John Gower and Others', in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England, c. 1100-c. 1500*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2009), pp. 118-34, and Richard Ingham, 'John Gower, poète anglo-normand: perspectives linguistique sur *Le Myroure de l'omme*', in *Anglo-français: philologie et linguistique*, ed. by Oreste Floquet and Gabriele Giannini, Rencontres, 119 (Paris: Garnier, 2015), pp. 90-100, alongside Michael Ingham and Richard Ingham, "'Pardonetz moi qe jeo de ceo forsvoie": Gower's Anglo-Norman Identity', *Neophilologus*, 99 (2015), 667-84. These receive corroboration in Ian Short, *Manual of Anglo-Norman*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn, Anglo-Norman Text Society, Occasional Publications Series 8 (Oxford: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2013).

<sup>14</sup> See Andrea Ruddick, *English Identity and Political Culture in the Fourteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). For the earlier cultural history of Anglo-Norman as a dialect of French used by people who identify themselves as

Perhaps more to the point, Yeager's position does not align with W. Mark Ormrod's thorough study of the Statute of Pleading, which finds that its assertion of an English identity rooted in the English language pertains to the cultural politics of the Treaty of Brétigny rather than to the practicalities of contemporary language use in England, and that the Statute concerns the language spoken in court proceedings rather than the status of French as a written language. Ormrod concludes that any pertinence the Statute might have to the development of English as a literary medium would have to be based on the premise that literature was often read aloud.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, French continued to flourish as a written medium in English administration into the fifteenth century.<sup>16</sup> The linguistic work of Richard Ingham has confirmed that the syntax of Anglo-Norman French began to deviate from continental usage in the second half of the fourteenth century, but this conclusion relies on its continued prevalence in documentary usage; moreover, it emerges from the observation that insular French syntax maintained parity with developments in continental usage before the middle of the century, suggesting that French was regularly acquired by English clerks in mid-childhood up to that point.<sup>17</sup> In the light of this there remains no objection to Macaulay's dating of the *Mirour* to the late 1370s, which rests on firmer grounds than Yeager's re-assessment – that the treatment of the sin of Disobedience includes an address to the people of France refusing to accept the King's right to the throne through

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English, see Laura Ashe, *Fiction and History in England, 1066-1200* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). Both Ruddick and Ashe heavily qualify the conclusions on this matter of Thorlac Turville-Petre, *England the Nation: Language, Literature, and National Identity, 1290-1340* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

<sup>15</sup> See W. Mark Ormrod, 'The Use of English: Language, Law, and Political Culture in Fourteenth-Century England', *Speculum*, 78. 3 (2003), 750-87.

<sup>16</sup> See W. Mark Ormrod, 'The Language of Complaint: Multilingualism and Petitioning in Later Medieval England', in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England, c. 1100-c. 1500*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2013), pp. 31-43.

<sup>17</sup> See Richard Ingham, *The Transmission of Anglo-Norman: Language History and Language Acquisition* (Amsterdam: Benjamins, 2012).

his mother, giving a *terminus ad quem* for this section of the poem in Edward III's death in 1377, and that the satire on the labourers warns that violence may come to pass, with the implication that the 1381 Rising had not yet occurred. This is complicated a little by the satire on the Papacy, which includes attention to the Great Schism of 1378; this could indicate that the poem was composed over the course of 1377-78, or that it was later partially revised.<sup>18</sup>

*Pastoralia* in Anglo-Norman French verse is likely to have been readily available to Gower in the 1370s. The majority of the surviving manuscripts containing Anglo-Norman *pastoralia* were produced in the first half of the fourteenth century, a fact that can be obscured by the thirteenth-century dates of composition for most treatises.<sup>19</sup> During this period long treatises like the *Manuel des péchés* and the *Lumere as lais* were circulated throughout England, as well as shorter works like Grosseteste's *Chasteu d'amur* or the *Mirour de seinte eglise*; these two long treatises in particular are among the Anglo-Norman works which are extant in the greatest number of copies, over twenty each.<sup>20</sup> In the *Manuel's* case, a fourteenth-century provenance can be

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<sup>18</sup> Macaulay, Introduction to French works, pp. xlii-xliii. For a study of the *Mirour's* treatment of London trade in its estates satire which attends closely to the context of the late 1370s, see James Davis, 'Towns and Trade', in *Historians on John Gower*, ed. by Stephen H. Rigby and Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2019), <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2102306&site=ehost-live>> [accessed 20 April 2021].

<sup>19</sup> See Ruth J. Dean and Maureen B. M. Boulton, *Anglo-Norman Literature: A Guide to Texts and Manuscripts*, Anglo-Norman Text Society, Occasional Publications Series 3 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1999).

<sup>20</sup> See Dean and Boulton; Glynn Hesketh, Introduction to Peter [Pierre] d'Abernon of Fetcham, *Lumere as lais*, ed. by Glynn Hesketh, 3 vols, Anglo-Norman Text Society, 54-58 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1996-2000), III (2000), 1-63; D. W. Russell, Introduction to *Le Manuel dé pechiez*, ed. by D. W. Russell, 3 vols, Anglo-Norman Text Society 75-77 (Oxford: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2019-), III (forthcoming). Prior to the supporting material to Russell's edition of the *Manuel*, the foremost studies of the treatise's circulation are Matthew T. Sullivan, 'The Original and Subsequent Audiences of the *Manuel des péchés* and its Middle English Descendants', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1990), excerpted and developed in Matthew T. Sullivan, 'Readers of the *Manuel des péchés*', *Romania*, 113. 449 (1992), 233-42, and Krista A. Murchison, 'Readers of the *Manuel des péchés* Revisited', *Philological Quarterly*, 95. 2 (2016), 161-99.

determined for copies from Durham, Quarr, Ludlow, and Lincolnshire: Cambridge, University Library, MS M.m.6.4 has an inscription from the Abbey at Quarr which Matthew Sullivan dates to c. 1350; London, British Library, MS Arundel 507 presents a folio from the *Manuel* in a compilation belonging to Richard Segbrok, a monk at Durham who died 1396-7; London, British Library, MS Harley 273 presents a version of *Manuel* incorporated into a volume collected by the Harley scribe, based in Ludlow, and finished in his hand between 1314-1329; and Robert Manning started translating *Handlyng Synne* from the *Manuel* in Kesteven in 1330, according to his prologue to the text.<sup>21</sup>

The copying of Anglo-Norman treatises did decline in the second half of the century, with the availability of *pastoralia* in English increasing dramatically after about 1375. Some of the most widely circulated works of *pastoralia* in English were composed before this date, but only saw a local circulation prior to this point – in particular the *Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum vitae*. In the period between 1375 and 1410 the circulation of these treatises across the country coincided with the composition of what many critics have considered to be the most inventive and ambitious wave of religious writing in Middle English.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, Anglo-Norman treatises were still

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<sup>21</sup> For Cambridge, University Library, MS M.m.6.4 see Sullivan, ‘Audiences of the *Manuel*’, p. 117; for London, British Library, MS Arundel 507 see Murchison, ‘Readers of the *Manuel*’, p. 183, and Ralph Hanna, *The English Manuscripts of Richard Rolle: A Descriptive Catalogue* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2010), item 45; for London, British Library, MS Harley 273 see Carter Revard, ‘Scribe and Provenance’, in *Studies in the Harley Manuscript: The Scribes, Contents, and Social Contexts of British Library MS Harley 2253*, ed. by Susanna Fein (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), pp. 21-109; for Manning see Robert Manning of Brunne, *Robert of Brunne’s Handlyng Synne*, ed. by Frederick J. Furnivall, 2 vols, Early English Text Society, Original Series 119 and 123 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1901-03), II. 57-76, with the important emendation proposed in Ralph Hanna, ‘Robert Manning: Some Textual – and Biographical – Emendations’, *Notes and Queries*, New Series 66. 1 (2019), 26-28.

<sup>22</sup> See Ralph Hanna, ‘Yorkshire Writers’, *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 121 (2003), 91-109, and Ralph Hanna, *Introducing English Medieval Book History: Manuscripts, their Producers, and their Readers* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2013), pp. 96-131, supplemented by the evidence compiled in Robert E. Lewis

read and circulated throughout the fifteenth century. Aside from the aforementioned compilation including a leaf from the *Manuel* produced by Richard Segbrok in the late fourteenth century, Bodleian Library, MS Hatton 99 (4057) includes a copy of the *Manuel* produced at the start of the fourteenth century, with a note on fol. 138v reading ‘Thys boke gyffys dame Margaret Cokfeld to Marget Byngham. In the 3ere of oure Lorde j ml cccco liiiij’ (1454). Further to this the two complete copies of the *Livre des saints medicines* date from the second half of the fourteenth century, Stonyhurst MS 24 from c. 1360 and Cambridge, Corpus Christi MS 218 later, with the fragments in Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, MS Peniarth 388 c 2 dating from the last quarter of the century; two copies of an Anglo-Norman *exemplum* on the efficacy of trentals were added to older devotional books in the second half of the fourteenth century in Princeton, University Library, MS Garrett 34 (the thirteenth-century Tewkesbury Psalter) and Huntington Library MS 1346 (an earlier fourteenth-century book of hours); and the sole surviving copy of John of Howden’s *Rossignos* was produced in the second half of the fourteenth century.<sup>23</sup> While the *Mirour* is the last surviving extended work of *pastoralia* to have been composed in Anglo-Norman

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and Angus McIntosh, *A Descriptive Guide to the Manuscripts of the Prick of Conscience*, Medium Ævum Monographs, New Series 12 (Oxford: Society for the Study of Medieval Languages and Literature, 1982). The best illustration of the local circulation of Middle English texts prior to 1375 in the London area is Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300-1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005). For the celebration of the period 1375-1410, see, for instance, Nicholas Watson, ‘Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409’, *Speculum*, 70. 4 (1995), 822-64; Nicole R. Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); and Fiona Somerset, *Clerical Discourse and Lay Audience in Late-Medieval England*, Cambridge Studies in Medieval Literature, 37 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>23</sup> See Dean and Boulton, entry 696, and Batt, pp. 5-17; Dean and Boulton, entry 642; Glynn Hesketh, Introduction to John of Howden, *Rossignos*, ed. by Glynn Hesketh, Anglo-Norman Text Society, 63 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2006), pp. 1-30.

French, it is not clear that it would have appeared particularly old fashioned in the 1370s.

The most obvious difference between the *Mirour* and other long Anglo-Norman verse works of pastoralia like the *Manuel* and the *Lumere* is its composition in the stanza form AABAABBBABBA rather than in rhyming couplets. This form is not found in any of the prominent Anglo-Norman treatises, but was widely used on the continent, with a particular association with moral and devotional writing; it has generally been known as the *strophe hélinandien* due to its early use in the influential *Vers de la mort* of Hélinant of Froidmont.<sup>24</sup> Scholars have generally assumed that Gower acquired the form through acquaintance with Hélinant's *Vers* itself, supported by the fact that Gower quotes a stanza from the poem in the *Mirour* (*MO*, ll. 11,401-12).<sup>25</sup> It is, however, likely that he would have been aware of its wider usage. Closer and more extensive parallels can be found between the *Mirour* and two of the other earliest and most widely available treatises composed in the *strophe hélinandien*, the Recluse of Molliens' *Roman de charité* and *Roman de miserere*. In many respects the *Mirour* resembles a fusion and reorganisation of these two works.

Most of the sections in the *Mirour*'s *ordinatio* have a parallel in the Recluse's work. Its extended opposition of vices and virtues is paralleled in the *Roman de*

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<sup>24</sup> The classic outline of the tradition is Adolf Bernhardt, *Die altfranzösische Helinandstrophe* (Munster: Aschendorffschen Buchdruckerei, 1912). It has received recent further attention in Levente Sélaf, 'La Strophe d'Hélinand: sur les contraintes d'une forme médiévale', in *Formes strophiques simples/Simple Strophic Patterns*, ed. by Levente Sélaf, Patrizia Noel Aziz Hanna, and Joost van Driel (Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 2010), pp. 73-92, and Silvère Menegaldo, 'Introduction: Une forme médiévale à succès: la strophe d'Hélinand', *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, 36 (2018), 13-22; the articles in the 2018 special issue address the use of the form in specific texts.

<sup>25</sup> This position is upheld in the most complete treatment of Gower's use of the form, R. F. Yeager, 'The "Strophe d'Hélinand" and John Gower', *Cahiers de recherches médiévales et humanistes*, 36 (2018), 115-33.



*miserere* and its extended estates satire in the *Roman de charité*.<sup>26</sup> Its passage of self-examination echoes the opening of the *Roman de miserere*, while the ensuing penitential summary of the Virgin Mary's role in salvation history, framed in prayer to her, recalls both the summary of salvation history from Mary to the Last Judgement in the *Charité* and the final prayer on the names of the Virgin Mary in the *Miserere*.<sup>27</sup> Much of the remainder of the *Mirour* can be accounted for in an acquaintance with the widespread tradition of the devil's daughters and their marriage to the world, and a refiguration of the conflict between vice and virtue in the *Miserere* – which takes place between Pride and the ensuing Envy and Avarice in assault on the five senses, countered by four wardens, Fear, Sorrow, Joy, and Hope – into the more common categories of the Seven Deadly Sins and their remedies based on the *Somme le roi*.<sup>28</sup> The *Mirour* is not an erring attempt to produce a cosmological epic comparable with the work of Dante or Milton, but a mildly idiosyncratic work of *pastoralia*. Its relationship to salvation history is similar to that of the other works of *pastoralia* considered in this thesis: it aims to alert its audience to their place in the credal narrative through its long

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<sup>26</sup> See Recluse of Molliens, *Li Romans de miserere*, in *Li Romans de carité et miserere*, ed. by A. - G. van Hamel, 2 vols, Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes études, sciences, philologues et historiques, 61-62 (Paris: Vieweg, 1885), II. 133-285 (stanzas 77-190), and Recluse of Molliens, *Li Romans de carité*, in *Li Romans de carité et miserere*, ed. by A. - G. van Hamel, 2 vols, Bibliothèque de l'École des hautes études, sciences, philologues et historiques, 61-62 (Paris: Vieweg, 1885), I. 1-129 (stanzas 4-151), respectively.

<sup>27</sup> Recluse, *Miserere*, stanza 1 and stanzas 259-73; Recluse, *Carité*, stanzas 174-202.

<sup>28</sup> For the tradition of the devil's daughters, along with a specific Anglo-Norman instantiation, see Paul Meyer, 'Notice du MS Rawlinson Poetry 241', *Romania*, 29. 113 (1900), 1-84, and Catherine Léglu, 'The Devil's Daughters and a Question of Translation between Occitan and Anglo-Norman French: "De las .vii. filhas del diable" (British Library Add. MS 17920)', *Revue d'études d'oc: la France latine*, 160. 1 (2015), 93-123. The classic study of the development and increasing promulgation of the Seven Deadly Sins remains Morton Bloomfield, *The Seven Deadly Sins: An Introduction to the History of a Religious Concept, with Special Reference to Medieval English Literature* (East Lansing: Michigan State College Press, 1952), with its counterpart for the virtuous in István P. Bejczy, *The Cardinal Virtues in the Middle Ages: A Study in Moral Thought from the Fourth to the Fourteenth Century*, Brill's Studies in Intellectual History, 202 (Leiden: Brill, 2011).

analysis of the vices and virtues and its satire on the prevalence of the vices in the world, to urge them to repentance through its implication of this in human free will and the speaker's own repentance, and to show them the fulfilment of doctrine and practice which will lead them to the still point of salvation through its prayer to the Virgin Mary, which narrates events from the incarnation to the end of time.

### Gower's Moral Poetry

The *Mirour* substantially differs from other works of *pastoralia* in so far as it is presented as the work of a poet. The compilers of Anglo-Norman verse *pastoralia* depicted themselves as clerks undertaking a menial service, hoping that the pain of their labour will be compensated by its spiritual efficacy, unworthy though their efforts may be. The *Manuel des péchés* opens with the compiler's refusal to name himself and his hope for grace:

Mun nun ne voil ici cunter,  
 Kar de Deu sul je quer luer;  
 Bien say ke checun recevra  
 De Deu cum meus traveilera.

I do not want to tell you my name here because I seek reward from God alone; I know well that everyone will receive from God as he has best worked.<sup>29</sup>

Even the prologue to the *Lumere as lais*, which aligns the treatise with God's presence in Jesus Christ, sees Peter d'Abernon present himself as an abject secondary *causa efficiens*:

Ki ke veut enquere de mun nun,  
 Un clerc sui de petit renun,  
 De poi value, veraiment,  
 Endreit del cors e de entendement,

<sup>29</sup> *Le Manuel dé pechiez*, ed. by D. W. Russell, 3 vols, Anglo-Norman Text Society 75-77 (Oxford: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 2019-), I (2019), 99-102.

For whoever should wish to ask for my name, I am a clerk of little renown, of little capacity, to tell the truth, both in my body and in my understanding.<sup>30</sup>

These are both modesty *topoi*, but they stand in contrast to the way in which Gower presents his speaker in the *Mirour*. His speaker does not silently ask for intercession for his labour, but defends his efforts against those who would claim that he is not qualified to undertake them. He ends his satire on churchmen:

Mais s'aucun m'en soit au travers,  
 Et la sentence de mes vers  
 Voldra blamer de malvuillance,  
 Pour ce *que* je ne suy pas clers,  
 Vestu de sanguin ne de pers,  
 Ainz ai vestu la raye mance,  
 Poy sai latin, poy sai romance,  
 Mais la commune tesmognance  
 Du poeple m'ad fait tout apers  
 A dire, *que* du fole errance  
 Les clercs dont *vous* ay parlance  
 Encore sont ils plus divers.

But should anyone be against me and want to blame the judgement of my verses out of ill will, on the basis that I am not a clerk dressed in red or blue, but have worn the striped sleeve – I know little Latin, I know little French – the common testimony of the people has nonetheless made it entirely clear that I might say that which I have said about the wild erring of the clerks, that about which I have been talking to you – they are still more inconstant.

(*MO*, ll. 21,769-80)

Part of this more assertive perspective emerges from the fact that Gower was a squire and never in holy orders; the labour he is undertaking is not obviously part of his vocation.<sup>31</sup> This passage is the basis for the common understanding that Gower could have been a lawyer, largely grounded in John Hurt Fisher's influential biography.<sup>32</sup> The

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<sup>30</sup> Peter d'Abernon, *Lumere as lais*, ed. by Glynn Hesketh, 3 vols, Anglo-Norman Text Society, 54-58 (London: Anglo-Norman Text Society, 1996-2000), I (1996), 543-46.

<sup>31</sup> See Carlin, 'Gower's Life'.

<sup>32</sup> John Hurt Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (London: Methuen, 1965).

possibility has never been proven but has become a common site of attention in studies of Gower's work; prominent studies by Conrad van Dijk and Candace Barrington have built on the prospect through attention to legal contexts in Gower's poetry.<sup>33</sup> More recently than Fisher, Lynne Mooney and Estelle Stubbs have proposed that Gower's striped sleeve might indicate service at the London Guildhall, while Sebastian Sobiecki has suggested that he could have been based at the Court of Chancery.<sup>34</sup> Anthony Musson has recently taken care to outline just how uncertain each of these prospects are on the basis of our knowledge of Gower's life and contemporary law.<sup>35</sup> This may not be the point: in a recent essay Andrew Galloway accepts that Gower might have worked as a lawyer, but concentrates on his establishment of a form of moral observation and rebuke which is not quite the same as that developed in ecclesiastical writing; it is unusually attentive to civic life and is highly indebted to the Roman lay voice of Seneca.<sup>36</sup> To take further Galloway's suggestion that Gower's main vantage point is not so much legal as that of a civic lay morality meeting ecclesiastical tradition, it is likely that previous scholarship has misinterpreted the *Mirour's* reference to a striped sleeve and, again, overcomplicated it. This passage is probably only setting Gower out as a 'burel clerk', a modesty *topos* he employs in the revised version of his prologue to the

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<sup>33</sup> See Conrad van Dijk, *John Gower and the Limits of the Law*, Publications of the John Gower Society, 8 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2013); Candace Barrington, 'John Gower's Legal Advocacy and "In Praise of Peace"', in *John Gower: Trilingual Poet*, ed. by Elisabeth M. Dutton, John Hines, and R. F. Yeager, Westfield Medieval Studies 3 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 112-25; and Candace Barrington, 'The Spectral Advocate in John Gower's Trentham Manuscript', in *Theorizing Legal Personhood in Late Medieval England*, ed. by Andreea Boboc (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 94-118.

<sup>34</sup> See Linne R. Mooney and Estelle Stubbs, *Scribes and the City: London Guildhall Clerks and the Dissemination of Middle English Literature, 1375-1425* (York: York Medieval Press, 2013); Sebastian Sobiecki, 'A Southwark Tale: Gower, the 1381 Poll Tax, and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*', *Speculum*, 92. 3 (2017), 630-60.

<sup>35</sup> Anthony Musson, 'Men of Law', in *Historians on John Gower*, ed. by Stephen H. Rigby and Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2019), <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2102306&site=ehost-live>> [accessed 20 April 2021]. See also the absence of any legal affiliation in the documentary record examined in Carlin, 'Gower's Life'.

<sup>36</sup> See Galloway, 'Gower in Striped Sleeves'.

*Confessio amantis* (CA, Prologue. 52-54). David Carlson has recognised that the symbolic naming practices of the *Cronica tripartita* include a pun on Simon Burley's name and burel-cloth: 'Corruit in fata gladii vestis stragulata' ('Burel-cloth/stripy-cloth fell to the fate of the sword').<sup>37</sup> A reasonable French translation of *vestis stragulata* would be *vesture rayé* – the *raye mance* which Gower has *vestu* in the *Mirour*. This passage should be considered as part of Gower's wider practice reusing material in his major poems, in translation across English, French, and Latin. Gower is setting out moral judgement from a perspective which is not quite that of the clerk behind *pastoralia*, but it is grounded in literary tradition rather than in legal training.

Gower claims that he is qualified to make his judgement on the clergy despite his lack of extensive education or holy orders because he has heard the *vox populi*, part of Galloway's understanding of the civic basis of his morality. This aspect of Galloway's argument fits tidily with Paul Miller's compelling 1983 proposition, based on his unpublished PhD thesis, that Gower developed much of his poetry on the conventions of satire outlined in *scholia* on Horace, Persius, and Juvenal, and further established in the Latin *satira communis* of Bernard of Cluny, Henry of Huntingdon, and Nigel Whitacre.<sup>38</sup> Miller outlines a tradition that the satirist is a poet-moralist, who

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<sup>37</sup> John Gower, *Cronica tripartita*, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), IV (1902), 314-42 (1. 140), addressed in David R. Carlson, *John Gower: Poetry and Propaganda in Fourteenth-Century England*, Publications of the John Gower Society, 7 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012), p. 128.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Miller, 'John Gower, Satirical Poet', in *Gower's Confessio amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. by Alastair J. Minnis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983), pp. 79-105. Miller is indebted to two important overviews of medieval satire: Udo Kindermann, *Satyra: Die Theorie der Satire im Mittellateinischen: Vorstudie zu einer Gattungsgeschichte*, Erlanger Beiträge zur Sprach- und Kunstwissenschaft, 58 (Nuremberg: Carl, 1978), and Jill Mann, *Chaucer and the Medieval Estates Satire: The Literature of Social Classes and the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973). This underpinning has received recent nuance in Ben Parsons, "'A Riotous Spray of Words": Rethinking the Medieval Theory of Satire', *Exemplaria*, 21. 2 (2009), 105-28. Parsons argues that prior studies neglected an element of misrule which survived the transition from classical satire to the medieval

does not employ the usual modes of poetic distortion, whose work is not necessarily humorous, and who attends to the immediate correction of morality with an eye to the correct functioning of society rather than the prospect of salvation history. Two leading conventions of this tradition are the poet's defence that he is not standing in judgement over the wrongs he recognises, because he is only repeating the recognition of them by the *vox populi*, and the need for the poet to admit to his own misconduct in society. This argument complements Galloway's observation of Gower's debt to Seneca; both critics grant Gower a new moral angle which rests on the prestige of ancient Latin texts. Part of the significance of this approach is that it is only subtly different to the clerical and ecclesiastical labour of *pastoralia*. Miller's distinction that the satirist attends to the functioning of society over the demands of salvation history actually needs to be nuanced by the presence of the satiric tradition he describes in some works of *pastoralia*. The Anglo-Norman *Roman des romans*, which often accompanies copies of the *Manuel des péchés*, such as in London, British Library MS Royal 20 B XIV and Princeton, University Library MS 1, is a satire on the clergy; the *Mariage des neuf filles du diable* is a satire on all of the estates with each matching one sin in particular; and the *Testament Jean de Meun* includes an extended satiric digression on the misconduct of clergy and women to urge its audience to take action for their salvation before death and not to rely on the intercession of others.<sup>39</sup> Miller identifies one of Gower's major developments of the satirical tradition in the *Mirour* as the connection of the attentions of the satirist to the exposition of vices and virtues and the life of the Virgin through the parallel it presents between satirical self-censure and confessional self-examination.<sup>40</sup>

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commentary tradition; this observation is astute but does not challenge Miller's claims regarding Gower.

<sup>39</sup> See *Le Testament maistre Jehan de Meun*, ed. by Silvia Buzzetti Gallarati in *Le Testament maistre Jehan de Meun: un caso letterario* (Alessandria: Edizioni dell'Orso, 1989), pp. 117-205 (ll. 409-1324).

<sup>40</sup> Miller, p. 93.

Again, this overstates the space between medieval traditions of satire and *pastoralia*, but it usefully recognises that Gower draws on material specific to both traditions: he innovates by basing his morality on prestigious Roman literary traditions where ecclesiastical authority is not as readily available to him, but he nonetheless strives to bring that tradition into harmony with the practices of *pastoralia*.

Miller argues that Gower is indebted to satire in both the *Mirour* and the *Vox clamantis*, as well as in the much briefer Prologue to the *Confessio amantis*. He observes that Books III to VI of the *Vox* present an estates satire similar to that in the *Mirour*, surrounded by Books II and VII, which set out the parameters for moral correction on which this operates; this is further surrounded by Book I's *Visio Anglie* on the 1381 Rising and the later *Cronica tripartita* on the fall of Richard II which was added to the end of the poem after 1399, the pair of which show the need for moral reform in the light of recent events in England.<sup>41</sup> This reading is astute. The *Vox* does not sit as readily in the tradition of *pastoralia* as the *Mirour* does, given that the greater part of it is dedicated to estates satire, with the remaining sections justifying the terms of that satire. However, both works can be seen as advancing a similar mode of moral poetry derived from the conjunction of Roman literary tradition and *pastoralia*. Scholars have not noticed the likelihood that they were composed as a single, bipartite project. Largely under the influence of Maria Wickert's 1960 study of the *Vox*, commentators have suspected that Book I was composed shortly after the rest of the poem, which would be structurally tidy if contained between Books II and VII, and does not mention the 1381 Rising in its treatment of the labourers (*VC*, 5. 557-1016 and *MO*, ll. 26,425-26,508).<sup>42</sup> There is no textual evidence which suggests that Book I of the *Vox* ever saw separate circulation; Book I is missing from Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS

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<sup>41</sup> Miller, p. 94.

<sup>42</sup> See Maria Wickert, *Studien zu John Gower* (Cologne: Kölner Universitäts-Verlag, 1953), pp. 11-30.

Laud misc. 719, but this is a relatively late copy with a text close to that of Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Digby 138, which includes it.<sup>43</sup> Nonetheless, it is feasible as a claim regarding the development of the poem. The fact that there are two textual traditions for the section of the *Vox*'s estates satire on the papacy, one which includes attention to the Papal Schism and one which does not, suggests that one of these represents a state of the text which dates from before the Schism took place in 1378. This means that Gower is likely to have worked on most of the *Vox* alongside the *Mirour* in the late 1370s. Macaulay observed that the two poems share a significant amount of material, particularly in their estates satires.<sup>44</sup> As well as the satire itself, the poems' attention to the place of sin in the world runs in close parallel; Books II and VII of the *Vox* contain material which matches the search for the origins of the world's corruption which follows the estate satire in the *Mirour*. Book II of the *Vox* addresses how people falsely blame Fortune for the state of the world, and how God actually has the power to intervene at any time to aid the righteous and punish the wicked; it gives a list of examples which are paralleled in the *Mirour*'s examination of how humanity's exercise of free will is responsible for all that is wrong in the world (*MO*, ll. 27,012-96 and *VC*, 2. 217-348). Book VII of the *Vox* returns to take up this theme, once the satire of Books III-VI has shown how human behaviour has been sinful. It parallels the same part of the *Mirour*, accusing the world of being bad, recognising how God made it good, and identifying that humans are each a *minor mundus*, with the world corrupted by human sin just as the human body is (*MO*, ll. 26,605-27,012 and *VC*, 7. 365-716). The *Mirour* and the *Vox* articulate a single form of moral poetry which conjoins the aims of

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<sup>43</sup> See G. C. Macaulay, Introduction to the Latin works, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), IV (1902), vii-lxxviii (pp. xxxi-xxxii).

<sup>44</sup> See Macaulay, Introduction to French works, pp. xxxvi-xli.



*pastoralia* and satire to find a role for the poet in the promulgation of religious truth and advancement of salvation history.

In its adaptation of specific classical literary traditions – the poetry of the satirists and the moral authority of Seneca – this mode of writing allows Gower to direct his audience to the demands of salvation history while inheriting the prestige of being a poet in the Roman tradition. Shortly after his death Gower’s works circulated in manuscripts with two different sets of Latin verses by *quidem philosophus*. The shorter set, usually found at the end of the *Confessio amantis*, decisively refer to him as ‘Carminis Athleta satirus tibi sive Poeta’ (‘Athlete of song, satirist, or poet’). The longer set, which accompanies the *Vox clamantis* in four copies and the *Confessio* in Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Fairfax 3, similarly lifts Gower’s reputation into the realms of classical poetic prestige, but also sets this glory in relation to salvation history (*CA*, closing ‘Epistola’). Gower’s poetry is *morigeris* – it bears morals – and is set in competition with that of Virgil, as a work for England to match his work for Rome. Gower’s poetry is found superior to Virgil’s because it aligns with Christian doctrine:

Ille quidem vanis Romanas obstupet aures,  
Ludit et in studiis musa pagana suis;  
Set tua Cisticolis fulget scriptura renatis,  
Quo tibi celicolis laus sit habenda locis.

He blocked up Roman ears with vain things, and a pagan muse played in his studies, but your writings shine before reborn Christians, on account of which may you have praise in heavenly places.<sup>45</sup>

Gower’s work is presented as the continuation of Roman poetic tradition, but also part of the narrative of salvation history; it brings the honours due to satire and *pastoralia* together. Where *dits amoureux* sought a role for poetry based on the act of distortion

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<sup>45</sup> ‘Eneidos bucolis’, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), IV (1902), 361.

worked out by Pseustis in the *Eclogue* of Theodulus, Gower's approach is more like that of the whole *Eclogue*: his mode of poetry in the *Mirour* covers material from the pagan poetical tradition through to the mystery of the incarnation, and its particular virtue lies in its ability to move between these poles. This is the poetic approach Chaucer is likely to have seen from Gower when he termed him *moral* and asked him to review *Troilus and Criseyde*, a work which he sends to follow Homer, Virgil, Ovid, Lucan, and Statius (*Troilus*, 5. 1856).

Just as he brings his moral poetry based on satire and Seneca into contest with Virgil, Gower also opens a dialogue with other modes of poetry. In his fusion of *pastoralia* and Roman literary tradition he is particularly attentive to the *dits amoureux*'s conception of the poet as a writer who addresses distortion, and in particular the experience of being in love. This is most obvious in the *Mirour*'s self-censure and penitential self-examination, drawn from conventions of both *pastoralia* and satire, in which Gower's speaker presents himself as a love poet in the process of spiritual reformation:

Jadis trestout m'abandonnoie  
 Au foldelit et veine joye,  
 Dont ma vesture desguisay  
 Et les fols ditz d'amours fesoie,  
 Dont en chantant je carolloie:  
 Mais ore je m'avisera  
 Et tout cela je changeray,  
 Envers dieu je supplieray  
 Q'il de sa grace me convoie;  
 Ma conscience accuseray,  
 Un autre chançon chanteray,  
 Que jady chanter ne soloie.

Once I completely abandoned myself to wild delight and vain joy, in which I disguised my appearance and made foolish love poems, singing which I carolled; but now I will take account of myself and I will change all of that, I will supplicate myself before God that he might grant me some of his grace; I will face my conscience, I will sing another song, which once I was not accustomed to sing.

(*MO*, ll. 27,337-48)

In his past work, which ‘en chantant je carolloie’, this speaker was a poet in the tradition of the *Roman de la rose*, in which the dreaming Amant joins a carol as soon as he enters the garden of Deduit (*RR*, ll. 725-28). He was also invested in deceit - ‘Dont ma vesture desguisay’. The poetry which he now composes is a vocalisation of truth: it is set with the new song of Psalm 97:1 and the song which only 144,000 saved can sing in Revelation 14. In singing this new song, Gower shows the world its real place in relation to truth and salvation history. It is a redirection of his old work: it removes deceit and leads an audience to the lasting love of God. The tradition of the *dits amoureux* is allowed into the poem, but only seen retrospectively through the narrative frame, as something from which the speaker has already repented. R. F. Yeager has consistently been a proponent of the idea that Gower seeks to correct the morality of the *Roman de la rose* and the subsequent *dits amoureux* throughout his poetic corpus from the *Mirour* to the *Confessio*; he suggests that the *Mirour* is a particular remedy to the *Roman de la rose*, given its address in the first surviving lines to ‘chascun amant, | Qui tant perestes desirant | Du peccché, dont l’amour est fals’ (‘each lover, who is so desirous of sin, the love of which is false’; *MO*, ll. 1-3).<sup>46</sup> This is too tight an interpretation of the *Mirour*: given Gower’s broad investment in *pastoralia* and Roman morality, the poem has much wider moral horizons than the correction of the *Rose*. However, it is a fair observation in so far as it recognises that Gower does present the *Mirour* as a remedied version of the *Rose*. He implies that the scheme of morality which he presents is the duty which should have been undertaken by the *Rose* and *dits amoureux* – that a mode of poetry which addresses divine love and the need for repentance, and which will lead an audience to full participation in salvation history, is what the pursuit of illusion and

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<sup>46</sup> See Yeager, *Gower’s Poetic*, a position recapitulated in Yeager, ‘Gower’s French’.

carnal love found in other poetic enterprises would become if it reached spiritual fulfilment.

Gower shows a particular acquaintance with the *Roman de la rose* throughout the *Mirour: Fals semblant* appears as the fifth and final species of Envy, a sin which is not separated into species in the *Somme*; Yeager has shown that Gower's Fear, the second child of the virtue of Humility, resembles the threatening *Peur* of the *Rose*, implicitly placing his virtue against the progress of a love affair like that of the dreaming *Amant*; and Philip Knox has suggested, in his recent work on the reception of the *Rose* in fourteenth-century England, that the *Testament* attributed to Jean de Meun might have provided a precedent for the speaker's confession in the *Mirour*.<sup>47</sup> However, commentators have overlooked the most sustained reference to the *Rose* in the *Mirour*: the search for the source of evil in the world that precedes the speaker's confession is an abbreviation of Nature's confession to Genius in the *Rose*. Both confessions look for the origin of error in the elements (*RR*, ll. 16,755-70 for the whole universe, ll. 18,937-50 for the world below the moon, and *MO*, ll. 26,617-26,700). They proceed to seek them in the heavens (with particular attention to the sun, the moon, the stars and the planets; *RR*, ll. 16,771-18,936 and *MO*, ll. 26,701-60), then in plants (*RR*, ll. 18,951-68 and *MO*, ll. 26,761-72), and then in animals (*RR*, ll. 18,969-90 and *MO*, ll. 26,773-84). They finally find that it comes from man, who is a *minor mundus* and abuses the gift of reason (*RR*, ll. 18,991-19024 and *MO*, ll. 26,785-26,844). The decisive difference between these passages is that where the *Mirour* simply recognises the human abuse of reason as the origin of the world's corruption, Nature comes to the same recognition, leaves it to God's impending judgement, and turns to the wrongs of which Love complains – that *Amant* has been kept away from the *Rose*, and is therefore failing to

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<sup>47</sup> See Yeager, *Gower's Poetic*, pp. 82-83; Philip Knox, 'The *Romance of the Rose* in Fourteenth-Century England' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2015), p. 108.

reproduce and is impeding her duty to ensure that creation replicates itself in the face of Death. The *Mirour* pivots on a correct version of one of the Jean de Meun's most startling gambits; whether the *Testament* was a direct influence or not, the *Mirour* adapts its retrospective consideration of Jean de Meun's work in the *Rose* through the frame of repentance.

This can be usefully be set in the context of both the *Mirour* and the *Rose* as mirrors.<sup>48</sup> In the middle of the *Rose*, near the introduction of the figure of Faux semblant, Amor explains how he will raise Jean de Meun to complete Guillaume de Lorris' poem, which he calls *le Miroër aus Amoreus* (*RR*, ll. 10,618-24). In Nature's confession, she digresses on both God's mirror in which he sees all things, which is himself, and the potential for mirrors to create optical illusions, some of which are similar to the illusions lovers have while they dream (*RR*, ll. 17,436-50 and ll. 18,217-18,374). Gower's *Mirour* ends in the speaker reflecting on the life and actions of the Virgin Mary, much as the Recluse of Molliens closes his *Roman de miserere* with a series of prayers to the Virgin which long for a direct vision of God which is unavailable in this life – that we may:

Fache a fache, non par image  
Ten fil veoir en majesté!  
Amen.

Face to face, not in a reflection, see your son in majesty!  
Amen.<sup>49</sup>

This recalls Wisdom 7:26: 'candor est enim lucis aeternae et speculum sine macula Dei maiestatis et imago bonitatis illius' ('For she [Wisdom] is the sweetness of eternal light,

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<sup>48</sup> For a recent study of reflection and error in the *Rose*, see Jonathan Morton, *The Romance of the Rose in its Philosophical Context: Art, Nature, and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 143-70.

<sup>49</sup> Recluse, *Miserere*, stanza 273.

and the mirror without spot of God's majesty, and the image of his goodness'), as well as 1 Corinthians 13:12 – 'videmus nunc per speculum in aenigmate tunc autem facie ad faciem' ('We see now by a mirror in a riddle: but then face to face'). The vision of Mary is the best reflection of God available, and prayer to her works as a correction to the game of optical errors carried out in the *Roman de la rose*. This grants the *Mirour* a means of looking back on the *Rose* and subsuming its mode of poetry into its own moral correction of all poetry, and ultimate alignment of poetry and *pastoralia*.

Just as the *Vox clamantis* stands as a Latin counterpart to the *Mirour*, it presents a corresponding correction of Latin amorous poetry. Much of the *Vox* is composed of lines from other Latin poets, adapted and rearranged, and Ovid is foremost among these with material taken from across the corpus of his works. Yeager argued that this was an attempt to work the Latin poetic tradition into a form befitting Christianity informed by late antique *cento*; this argument has since been corrected by David Carlson, who recognises that Gower's approach is more likely to have been informed by contemporary grammar school practices of *amplificatio* from Latin models.<sup>50</sup> It still stands that Gower speaks through a re-presentation of Ovid's work. The *amplificatio* of Ovidian material looks back across Ovid's developing career of error, suffering, moral correction, and Christian realisation – as presented by the *accessus* tradition and *De vetula*. This entire body of material is treated as a process which has now reached its

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<sup>50</sup> See Yeager, *Gower's Poetic*, pp. 45-66, and the response in both David R. Carlson, 'A Fourteenth-Century Anglo-Latin Ovidian: The *Liber exulis* in John Gower's 1381 *Visio Anglie* (*Vox clamantis* 1. 1359-1592)', *Classica et mediaevalia*, 61 (2010), 293-335, and David R. Carlson, 'Gower *Agonistes* and Chaucer on Ovid (and Virgil)', *Modern Language Review*, 109. 4 (2014), 931-52. For further attention to this amplification of Ovid, see Maura Nolan, 'The Poetics of Catastrophe: Ovidian Allusions in Gower's *Vox clamantis*', in *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature: Essays in Honour of Jill Mann*, ed. by Christopher Cannon and Maura Nolan (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2011), pp. 113-33; Sián Echard, 'How Gower Found his *Vox*: Latin and John Gower's Poetics', *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 26 (2016), 291-314; and Andrew Galloway, 'Gower's Ovids', in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature, 800-1558*, ed. by Rita Copeland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. 435-64.

full realisation in the demand that an audience attend to salvation history in the present. Gower's poetic mission is to urge his audience to the recognition of the process of salvation history of which Ovid became only slightly aware and through suffering. Yun Ni has recently argued that the *Vox* is alert to the variety and the contingency of forms of poetry in Ovid's corpus, and this important recognition can be supplemented with an eye to Gower's attention to this variegated corpus as something in motion – to Ovid's life as a writer being one of literary and spiritual revision and self-correction.<sup>51</sup> The *Vox* is the final point of the Ovidian journey, a mode of poetry which can look back on error with the narrative frame closed, and urge its audience to avoid further error through moral correction in time for the coming judgement.

*Vox clamantis* I: Gower's *Dit amoureux*

In the *Mirour* and the *Vox*, Gower requires amorous poetry to be on the other side of a closed narrative frame. As a result, Gower's new moral poetry stands in technical contrast to the amorous poetry which he looks back on. He has at once to claim that he fulfils a prestigious tradition, and yet is unable to work in the same mode due to the demands of salvation history which he addresses. In Book I of the *Vox clamantis* he moves beyond this impasse by composing a parodic *dit amoureux* on the 1381 Rising to show the urgency of moral reform in contemporary England. Book I of the *Vox* adapts a number of motifs from *dits amoureux*, which it proceeds to invert. It opens with Gower's *persona* awake in a *locus amoenus* like those in which dreams in the *dits amoureux* tradition often take place, and he is presented as a young man encountering them, explicitly ready for love and dedicated to play:

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<sup>51</sup> See Yun Ni, 'Between History and Prophecy: Ovidian Metamorphoses and the 1381 Revolt in Gower's *Visio Anglie*', *Chaucer Review*, 56. 1 (2021), 33-53.

Talia cumque videns oculus letatur, et illa  
 In thalamum cordis ducit ad yma viri;  
 Auris et auditu cordis suspiria pulsat,  
 Quo Venus in iuvene poscit amoris opem.  
 Ecce dies talia fuit, in qua tempus amenum  
 Me dabat in lusum girouagare meum.

And seeing such things my eye rejoices, and leads them into the innermost chamber of the heart, to the depth of the man; the ear and the hearing of the heart strike sighs, by which Venus places the power of love in a young man. Behold, it was in such a day, in which time granted me to wander in my beautiful play.  
 (VC, 1. 119-24)

Just as moral consequence is invoked and then set aside for the course of the poem's narrative in Guillaume de Machaut's *Jugement du roi de Navarre* and in the dream section of Jean Froissart's *Joli buisson de jeunesse*, this state of youthful and amorous play is set aside when Gower's *persona* goes to bed and dreams: in his dream he encounters the horror of common people rising against his city and transforming into domestic animals, then wild beasts; sees New Troy falling like old Troy; and escapes in a ship to be met by storms and sea monsters.<sup>52</sup> Instead of a poetry of distortion, Gower offers a poetry which urges his audience out of a state of distortion in which they live.

This tenor of the poem would be clear to its audience from early on; anyone of sufficient education to understand the poem's Latin would have recognised the title *Vox clamantis* not only as a reference to the account of John the Baptist's prophecy in Matthew 3, regarding the fulfilment of Isaiah 40:3, but also as a reference to the

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<sup>52</sup> For a sustained treatment of this *topos* and melancholia in the wider tradition of dream visions, see Alastair J. Minnis, with V. J. Scattergood and J. J. Smith, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 73-160. For a wider perspective of Gower's debt to the poetic dream tradition, see Andrew Galloway, 'Reassessing Gower's Dream Visions', in *John Gower: Trilingual Poet*, ed. by Elisabeth M. Dutton, John Hines, and R. F. Yeager, *Westfield Medieval Studies*, 3 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 288-303, and Andrew Galloway, 'Gower in his Most Learned Role and the Peasants' Revolt of 1381', *Mediaevalia*, 16 (1993), 329-47.



antiphon for the first Sunday in Advent.<sup>53</sup> The Epistle reading for the same Sunday is Romans 13:11-14, opening ‘Scientes quia hora est jam nos de somno surgere’ (‘Knowing that the time is now for us to rise from sleeping’).<sup>54</sup> The waking state of a society which attends to *dits amoureux* is a form of sleep, and Gower offers a mode of poetry which can lead it out of this stupor. Just as the mode of play in *dits amoureux* is suspended at the end of the poem, restoring normal moral consequence – sometimes with the poet’s *persona* waking out of a dream or reverie, as in Machaut’s *Dit du vergier* or Froissart’s *Paradis d’amour* – so the immediate moral consequence revealed in the *Vox*’s dream is set aside. However, this does not restore that playful state which precedes the dream, but simply leaves time for Gower to undertake the work which might urge the rest of England to repentance so that God’s condemnation of society might be averted: this work is, of course, the moral poetry which Gower presents in the other books of the *Vox*.

This parallel between Book I of the *Vox* and *dits amoureux* is imperfect because Gower indicates his poetic moves more clearly than is normal in the amorous tradition. *Dits amoureux* presents poetry as a study in distortion, and while Gower seeks to adapt that tradition to show its correction and fulfilment in the clarity of his moral vision, he maintains a state of clarity which justifies this process as he does so. He clearly directs his audience through the dream sequence. From the start of the account of the waking *locus amoenus* Gower’s audience would have been aware that he intends to address the invasion of London in 1381, as he opens with the lines ‘Contigit vt quarto Ricardi regis in anno, | Dum clamat mensem Iunius esse suum’ (‘It occurred that in the fourth year of

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<sup>53</sup> *The Sarum Missal*, ed. by John Wickham Legg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1916), p. 13.

<sup>54</sup> *Sarum Missal*, p. 15.

King Richard's reign, while it was the month that June claims to be his'; *VC*, 1. 1-2).

Were there any doubt about this, it would be resolved at the very start of the dream:

Nec michi longa via fuerat, dum proxima vidi  
 Innumerabilia monstra timenda nimis,  
 Diuersas plebis sortes vulgaris iniquas  
 Innumeris turmis ire per arua vagas.

The way had not seemed long to me when I saw nearby greatly terrifying,  
 innumerable portents, diverse evil omens concerning the common people pass,  
 wandering through the fields in innumerable crowds.

(*VC*, 1. 169-72)

Gower draws on myths in the dream in a way which further recalls *dits amoureux*, but he does so in a fashion which recalls the tradition of allegorical interpretation which the *dits amoureux* resisted: his myths are generally decipherable into the events of 1381 with which his audience would have been well acquainted. Further to this he unravels the parallels himself; he provides prose glosses to the *Vox*, but even within the text of its verses he frequently acts as commentator to his own poetry.<sup>55</sup> Gower introduces Archbishop Simon Sudbury as the priest Helenus in Troy, but when he laments his death Simon is both drawn into an explicit historical comparison to Thomas Becket and addressed by his own name: 'Quatuor in mortem spirarunt federa Thome, | Simonis et centum mille dedere necem' ('Four bound together conspired in the death of Thomas, and a hundred thousand offered up Simon to death'; *VC*, 1. 1056-57).<sup>56</sup> The ship which Gower's *persona* enters is only allowed to be obliquely figurative for a brief time before

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<sup>55</sup> For the complexity of Gower's glossing and its place in literary history, see Alastair J. Minnis, 'Inglorious Glosses?', in *John Gower in England and Iberia: Manuscripts, Influences, Reception*, ed. by Ana Sáez-Hidalgo and R. F. Yeager, Publications of the John Gower Society, 10 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2014), pp. 51-76, a response to Andrew Galloway, 'Gower's *Confessio amantis*, the *Prick of Conscience*, and the History of the Latin Gloss in Early English Literature', in *John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts*, ed. by Malte Urban and Georgiana Donavin, *Disputatio*, 13 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 39-70.

<sup>56</sup> The parallel between Sudbury and Helenus is explained in Conrad van Dijk, 'Simon Sudbury and Helenus in John Gower's *Vox clamantis*', *Medium Ævum*, 77. 2 (2008), 313-18.

he declares: ‘O quam tunc similis huic nauī Londoniarum | Turrīs erat, quod eam seua procella quatit’ (‘O then how similar was this ship to the Tower of London, for such a savage storm shakes it’; *VC*, 1. 1742-43).<sup>57</sup> Eventually the voice of God intervenes in the dream experience, in a localisation of authority which would impede the examination of distortion in any other *dit amoureux*. Gower’s speaker does not judge that he is hearing God, but simply declares it directly:

Quod deus ipse suam pro tempore distulit iram,  
 Vocis ab excelso protulit ista sonus;  
 Aeris e medio diuina voce relatum  
 Tunc erat et nostris auribus ista refert  
 Dixit, ‘Adhuc modicum restat michi tempus, et ecce  
 Differo iudicium cum pietate meum.’

For God himself set aside his wrath for the time, in a voice from on high he set forth this sound; with a divine voice this was then brought down from the middle of the air and resounded in our ears; he said, ‘A little time yet remains for me, and behold I will set aside my judgement in my honour.’

(*VC*, 1. 1887-92)

Gower’s parodic *dit amoureux* demonstrates the modes of distortion usually pursued in the tradition but withdraws from them in the course of this demonstration. God’s judgement is proffered to the dismay of Gower’s *persona*, and is then withdrawn, as in Machaut’s *Jugement du roi de Navarre*. However, in contrast to Machaut’s poem, this is not a period of relief in which happiness and playful poetry can be pursued; it is a period for reflection and penitence before judgement comes again. Beyond this, even in parody Gower’s inhabitation of the habits of *dits amoureux* is hesitant; he does not want the conditions of his dream to operate through distortion. In this sense it is apt that he reiterates the apostrophe *O vigiles sompni* (O wakeful dreams: *VC*, 1. 2141-46). It is a

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<sup>57</sup> The recent re-examination of the documentary record suggests that this account of refuge in the Tower may be more fictional than has sometimes been imagined, as Gower appears to have primarily resided at Aldington, outside Maidstone, in this period; see Carlin, ‘Gower’s Life’, along with Michael Bennett, ‘John Gower, Squire of Kent, the Peasants’ Revolt, and the *Visio Anglie*’, *Chaucer Review*, 53. 3 (2018), 258-82.

motif of *dits amoureux* that the narrator is unsure how to categorise his dream, particularly according to Macrobian or Aristotelian tradition.<sup>58</sup> In this case the dream is clearly identified as a message sent by divine inspiration on terms of unusually secure authority, recalling both John the Baptist's crying voice and the vision of John the Evangelist on Patmos, as Alastair Minnis influentially recognised.<sup>59</sup> It nonetheless matters that the sequence is classified as a dream; it has to carry the vestige of distortion for Gower's poetic project to appear as the correction and fulfilment of the entire tradition.

However, the final element of the dream is an encounter which resists quick explication: the ship lands on an island populated by violent giants, which Gower's *persona* does not recognise until an old man tells him it is the island of Britain (*VC*, 1. 1963-64). Gower's England is rendered unfamiliar, the site of dissent and violence; the end of his realisation of moral consequence is to return to the society he inhabits, but to find that it has always been out of shape. The poem makes it both familiar and unfamiliar, and in this process sets out the recognition of sin which is the condition for repentance; it is a study in both distortion and the dissolution of distortion, which stands as preparation for the self-examination demanded in the remainder of the *Vox*. In his parody of *dits amoureux* Gower grants that they are a pseustical form; they are dedicated to distortion and falsehood. By asserting that through a dialogue with truth, as in the *Eclogue* of Theodulus, Gower is not just able to claim the prestige of poetry and

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<sup>58</sup> The classic study of this dream vision convention, with others, is A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Dream Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

<sup>59</sup> See Alastair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn with a new preface by the author (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010). pp. 168-77. Minnis's account can be supplemented with the recent reading of an incarnational divine authority in Stephanie Batkie and Matthew W. Irvin, 'Incarnational Making in *Vox clamantis* II', in *Studies in the Age of Gower: A Festschrift in Honor of R. F. Yeager*, ed. by Susannah Mary Chewning, Publications of the John Gower Society, 13 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2020), pp. 35-58.

the good of moral instruction, as in his use of the *Rose* in the *Mirour* and Ovid in the *Vox*, but is also able to show that the process of bringing clarity to the distortions of poetry can turn that distortion into a kind of virtue, as its dissolution can reveal the parallel distortions of sin. Before he began work on the *Confessio amantis* in the late 1380s, this was the fullest attention Gower was willing to grant *dits amoureux*. He was willing to invest an encounter with the distortion of poetry with the significance of being a process which could induce virtue, but this remained dependent on the distortions being resolved, and further progression from poetry's distortion to the clarity of wider moral realisation and participation in salvation history. Gower's engagement with *dits amoureux* formed the foundation of his moral work, but only as a ground level of error from which he required his audience to depart in attending to his new, reformed poetic project.

## Chapter 3

## Chaucer as a Poet and Religious Writer

Chaucer, in the address to ‘moral Gower’ at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde*, arguably refers to the mode of moralised poetry developed by his contemporary (*Troilus*, 5. 1856). Although Chaucer’s own only sustained work of *pastoralia* was the Parson’s Tale, he was also invested in moral and devotional writing throughout his career. The Parson’s Tale is the only work of abstract instruction in doctrine and devotional practice compiled by Chaucer, but it was preceded by a series of translations of authoritative religious treatises: his lost versions of the pseudo-Origen *De Maria Magdalena* and Innocent III’s *De miseria conditionis humanae*, his life of St Cecilia – a translation from two Latin versions of the *vita*, which survives in the *Canterbury Tales* as the Second Nun’s Tale – and his translation of Boethius’ *De consolacione philosophiae*. These all invite a devotional response from their audience; in their light, the Parson’s Tale does not represent a new direction in Chaucer’s writing. However, the Parson’s Tale differs from these works in its integration into the poetic project of the *Canterbury Tales*.

Before the *Tales*, Chaucer worked remarkably hard to separate his work as a translator of religious treatises from his poetry. In order to keep his poetry apart from this serious religious work and its recourse to the demands of salvation history, he relied on the *dit amoureux*’s tradition of the narrative frame. In this respect he stands in contrast to Gower, who strove to establish a role as a poet who could attend directly to salvation history. This took caution and virtuosity; in the case of the *Boece* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer addressed the same body of material on God’s foreknowledge and human free will from the two separate sides of his career, on one occasion presenting authoritative guidance on the problem for an audience attentive to the demands of salvation, and on the other holding it apart from these demands and leaving the problem

unresolved to produce poetic play, based in obscurity and distortion. Chaucer's maintenance of this division between poetry and religious writing proved to be controversial within his own lifetime. One of his earliest readers, Thomas Usk, composed the *Testament of Love* in response to both *Troilus* and the *Boece*, in which he brings together authoritative religious instruction and poetics, in contrast to Chaucer. Usk associates the *Testament* with the figure of Chaucer as a 'philosophical poet', obscuring the difference between his own work and Chaucer's, and firmly departing from the precarity of Chaucer's split career.

#### Chaucer's Two Writing Careers

The question of religious significance in Chaucer's poetry has been disputed for centuries. Half a century after Chaucer's death, the Oxford theologian Thomas Gascoigne recorded what he claimed was an informed account of Chaucer's lamentation at his inability to prevent his carnal, worldly love poetry from being circulated in his old age - 'illa que male scripsi de malo et turpissimo amore hominum ad mulieres' ('that which I wrote of the bad and most wicked love of men towards women').<sup>1</sup> Only a couple of decades later, in the nearby Chilterns, John Baron of Amersham's possession of a copy of the *Canterbury Tales* was taken to evince a very different sin, cited as relevant evidence to accompany his possession of religious books in English in a heresy enquiry against him, with the assumption that his reading of this particular worldly poetry might have been integrated in some way with his reading in vernacular

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<sup>1</sup> Thomas Gascoigne, *Dictionarium theologicum*, preserved as Oxford, Lincoln College MSS Latin 117-18, MS 118, p. 376, transcribed in Míceál F. Vaughan, 'Personal Politics and Thomas Gascoigne's Account of Chaucer's Death', *Medium Ævum*, 75. 1 (2006), 103-22 (p. 103).

theology.<sup>2</sup> The Protestant polemicist John Foxe would not have been surprised by this, proclaiming Chaucer ‘a right Wicleuian, or els was neuer any’, not least because he understood him to have composed the religious polemic of the Ploughman’s Tale, but not all of his contemporaries shared this understanding of the piety latent in Chaucer’s poetry.<sup>3</sup> The English expansion of a Latin sermon against rebellion by Peter Martyr Vermigli, preserved in Cambridge, Corpus Christ College MS 102 and often attributed to Thomas Cranmer, takes the *Canterbury Tales* as a byword for meaningless fable: ‘If we receive and repute the Gospel as a thing most true and godly, why do we not live according to the same? [...] If we take it for a Canterbury Tale, why do we not refuse it, why do we not laugh it out of place, and whistle at it?’<sup>4</sup> There seems to have been little consensus as to how far it was worth pushing the interpretation of Chaucer’s poetic works as pertinent to serious religious conviction.

Modern academic criticism has not been able to fully divorce itself from this problem, most colourfully evinced in the aggressively exegetical mode of criticism D. W. Robertson advocated in the middle of the last century and the persistent, vocal resistance it met with for years afterwards.<sup>5</sup> Aside from this, the same problem has emerged in a quieter degree of controversy as to how far Chaucer might have expected the *Canterbury Tales* to be read with a serious interest in pilgrimage as an underlying

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<sup>2</sup> See Anne Hudson, ‘Lollardy: The English Heresy?’, *Studies in Church History*, 18 (1982), 261-83.

<sup>3</sup> John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online (1583 edition)*, ed. by Mark Greengrass et al. (Sheffield: Digital Humanities Institute, 2011), <<http://www.dhi.ac.uk/foxe>> [accessed 20 April 2021].

<sup>4</sup> ‘A Sermon Concerning the Time of Rebellion’, in *The Remains of Thomas Cranmer*, ed. by Henry Jenkyns, 4 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1833), II. 248-73 (p. 266).

<sup>5</sup> Robertson’s approach is most readily outlined in D. W. Robertson, *A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962), and appeared urgent enough to warrant objection as late as Carolyn Dinshaw, *Chaucer’s Sexual Poetics* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), pp. 28-38, and Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991), p. 147.



seam, eventually brought to the surface in the Parson's Tale and the Retractions.<sup>6</sup> By the end of the century this conflict seems to have been laid aside in favour of a Chaucer who is not primarily invested in religious matters. Much of this development is worth crediting to studies which have attended more precisely to Chaucer's debt to modes of exegesis, to a certain extent putting his relationship with such scholarly practices in its place; the classic studies produced towards the end of the last century by Alastair Minnis, on the adaptation of academic ideas of authority in vernacular literature, and Rita Copeland, on the relationship between academic commentary and receptive literary invention, have been particularly influential in positioning Chaucer as a playful adapter of serious academic commentary.<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Watson has provided three useful overviews of the position this leaves for religious matters in Chaucer's poetry, suggesting that criticism remains haunted by the spectre of theologically totalising or exegetical readings, but that this can make it 'hard to take seriously' the prospect that a poem like the *Canterbury Tales* does operate on the basis of a set of quiet theological assumptions – that there is a spiritual drama inherent in the lives of the *mediocriter boni* it addresses as both its subject and its audience, and that it is necessary to examine how a religiously informed morality might operate in relation to human behaviour in the

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<sup>6</sup> The basics of the controversy are set out in Charles Muscatine, 'Chaucer's Religion and the Chaucer Religion', in *Chaucer Traditions: Studies in Honour of Derek Brewer*, ed. by Ruth Morse and Barry A. Windeatt (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), pp. 249-62, which objects to Donald R. Howard, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976) and V. A. Kolve *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> See Alastair J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn with a new preface by the author (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), and Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation in the Middle Ages: Academic Translations and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). A clear overview of the playful status this grants Chaucer's poetry can be found in Alastair J. Minnis, with V. J. Scattergood and J. J. Smith, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995).

world.<sup>8</sup> For Watson, to address these questions seriously would be to defuse some of the problems which have haunted readings of Chaucer reaching back to the fifteenth century, and to account for his poetry as an art which does not advance a programmatic theology, but which is also not oblivious to its theological implications.

This is admirable, but one problem with this approach is that it still fixed on a desire ‘to think of Chaucer as a religious poet.’<sup>9</sup> Watson does not go further than suggesting that Chaucer is a poet who is bound to work with theological implications given the profundity of his society’s investment in religion, but the phrase ‘religious poet’ tends to suggest more; the consensus that Chaucer is sceptical about a poet’s ability to be a religious authority in poetry is worth upholding.<sup>10</sup> This chapter argues that in his general career as a writer Chaucer pays great attention to moral consequence, informed by religion, but actually works hard to keep it away from his poetry. This is a prospect that few recent discussions of Chaucer have raised. The 2010 collection of essays on *Chaucer and Religion* edited by Helen Phillips is overwhelmingly devoted to readings of the religious implications, or even the implications of themes adjacent to religion, in Chaucer’s poetry, alongside contributions by Frances McCormack and Dee Dyas which address the historical question of Chaucer’s association with Wycliffite thought and the broad historical context of pilgrimage communities, respectively.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Watson, ‘Langland and Chaucer’, in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, ed. by Andrew Hass, David Jasper, and Elisabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 363-81 (p. 367); see also Nicholas Watson, ‘Christian Ideologies’, in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. by Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 75-89, and Nicholas Watson, ‘Chaucer’s Public Christianity’, *Religion and Literature*, 37. 2 (2005), 99-114.

<sup>9</sup> Watson, ‘Public Christianity’, p. 99.

<sup>10</sup> For a concise reading of Chaucer’s hostility to Dante’s proposal of a religious poetry, see Helen Cooper, ‘The Four Last Things in Dante and Chaucer: Ugolino in the House of Rumour’, *New Medieval Literatures*, 3 (2000), 39-66.

<sup>11</sup> See Frances M. McCormack, ‘Chaucer and Lollardy’, in *Chaucer and Religion*, ed. by Helen Phillips, *Christianity and Culture: Issues in Teaching and Research*, 4 (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 35-40, and Dee Dyas, ‘Chaucer and the Communities of Pilgrimage’, in *Chaucer and Religion*, ed. by Helen Phillips, *Christianity and Culture: Issues in Teaching and Research*, 4 (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 132-42.

Only Sherry Reames' essay on the persistent complexity and reverence of Chaucer's prayers and attention to saints across the 'ABC to the Virgin', the Second Nun's Tale, and the Prioress' Tale, makes contact with the body of religious writing composed by Chaucer.<sup>12</sup> This dedication to searching for religious themes in Chaucer's poetry in particular underpins two very different recent studies of Chaucer and religion: John Bugbee's recent call for a religious reading of Chaucer's poetry which is attentive to the conjoint agency of human and divine will, and Nancy Bradley Warren's recent investigation of the use of Chaucer in religious controversies.<sup>13</sup> Megan Murton's recent work on Chaucer's prayers develops an unusual and inventive means of avoiding this, as it sets the relationship between Chaucer's religious work and his poetry at the centre of his career, finding a Chaucerian poetic voice which emerges from the relationship between regular and fictional prayer.<sup>14</sup> This is a useful way of considering the range of Chaucer's writing from a single angle, and a vital remedy to wider critical distortions. This chapter does not challenge Murton's position; it approaches the same prospect of both fictional and religious writing in Chaucer's corpus from a slightly different angle, attending to how Chaucer sustains a division between religious and poetic writing when the two are composed in the same medium.

The prospect of Chaucer having a poetic career that is only tangentially connected to religion, and alongside a distinct career as religious writer which has

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<sup>12</sup> Sherry Reames, 'Mary, Sanctity, and Prayers to Saints: Chaucer and Late-Medieval Piety', in *Chaucer and Religion*, ed. by Helen Phillips, *Christianity and Culture: Issues in Teaching and Research*, 4 (Woodbridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 81-96.

<sup>13</sup> See John Bugbee, *God's Patients: Chaucer, Agency, and the Nature of Laws* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019); Nancy Bradley Warren, *Chaucer and Religious Controversies in the Medieval and Early Modern Eras* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> See Megan E. Murton, *Chaucer's Prayers: Writing Christian and Pagan Devotion*, *Chaucer Studies*, 47 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2020). An approach which similarly reaches across Chaucer's poetry and devotional writing to examine the act of prayer as a narrative device, but again with attention primarily given to the poetry, can be found in Sheri Anne Jones Smith, 'Answers to Prayer in Chaucer' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Cardiff University, 2016).

different tendencies to his poetic work, emerges from Chaucer's own writing. Chaucer supplies two catalogues of his works, both relatively late in his life; Jamie Fumo has recently suggested that these are worth reading together as sites on which Chaucer is unusually forthcoming in his shaping of an authorial career.<sup>15</sup> In both, Chaucer divides his body of works in two. In the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, Alceste defends the narrator from the God of Love's allegations of heresy against his law, due to his translation of the *Roman de la rose* and composition of *Troilus and Criseyde*, by reminding the God of the meritorious works Chaucer has undertaken:

“He made the bok that highte the Hous of Fame,  
 And ek the Deth of Blaunche the Duchesse,  
 And the Parlement of Foules, as I gesse,  
 And al the love of Palamon and Arcite  
 Of Thebes, thogh the storye is knowen lite;  
 And many an ympne for your halydayes,  
 That highten balades, roundeles, vyrelayes;  
 And, for to speke of other besynesse,  
 He hath in prose translated Boece,  
 And of the Wreched Engendrynge of Mankynde,  
 As man may in Pope Innocent yfynde;  
 And mad the lyf also of Seynt Cecile.  
 He made also, gon is a grete while,  
 Orygenes upon the Maudeleyne.”

(*LGW*, G Prologue. 406-18)<sup>16</sup>

The division is here between works which advance the God of Love directly, and the ‘other besynesse’ (‘other holynesse’ in *LGW*, F Prologue. 424) which reflects well on Chaucer's *making*. It is a division between his amorous poetry, indebted to the francophone tradition of the *dit amoureux*, and his religious translations. It is worth

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<sup>15</sup> See Jamie C. Fumo, ‘The God of Love and the Love of God: Palinodic Exchange in the Prologue of the *Legend of Good Women* and the “Retraction”’, in *The Legend of Good Women: Context and Reception*, ed. by Carolyn Collette (Cambridge: Brewer, 2006), pp. 157-75; this argument stands in the context of the wider contention that Chaucer has a complex, ambivalent stance on the Apollonian history of poetic inspiration, made in Jamie C. Fumo, *The Legacy of Apollo: Antiquity, Authority, and Chaucerian Poetics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010).

<sup>16</sup> The G version quoted here, uniquely preserved in Cambridge, University Library MS Gg 4. 27, provides the more complete catalogue of works.

noting that this passage is roughly divided in half: there is no sense that the religious translations are an addendum to a writing career mainly dedicated to the composition of amorous poetry, even though this defence of Chaucer is addressed to the God of Love himself, in a dream vision indebted to Guillaume de Machaut's *Dit du vergier* and *Jugement du roy de Navarre*. This sense of an equal division is rarely held in critical and historical imaginations of the Chaucerian corpus of works, not least due to the loss of the translations of Innocent III's *De miseria humanae conditionis* and the pseudo-Origen *De Maria Magdalena*, against none of the amorous works listed here (assuming, in accordance with scholarly orthodoxy, that the story of Palamon and Arcite and the Life of St Cecilia are preserved with little alteration as the Knight's Tale and the Second Nun's Tale).<sup>17</sup> In 2006 Karen Elizabeth Gross addressed the lost *De Maria Magdalena* translation, exploring how it could be incorporated 'into our image of the coolly ironic Chaucer'; this may not be necessary, as it is likely that a full surviving corpus of Chaucer's works would provide more instances in which he is less 'coolly ironic' than in much his poetry.<sup>18</sup> The division between Chaucer's works is reiterated in the Retraction at the end of the *Canterbury Tales*:

Wherefore I biseke yow mekely, for the mercy of God, that ye preye for me that Crist have mercy on me and foryeve me my giltes;/ and namely of my translacions and enditynges of wordly vanitees, the whiche I revoke in my retracciouns:/ as is the book of Troilus; the book also of Fame; the book of the xxv. Ladies; the book of the Duchesse; the book of Seint Valentynes day of the Parlement of Briddes; the tales of Caunterbury, thilke that sownen into synne;/ the book of the Leoun; and many another book, if they were in my remembrance, and many a song and many a leccherous lay, that Crist for his grete mercy foryeve me the synne./ But of the translacion of Boece de Consolacione, and othere bookes of legendes of seintes, and omelies, and moralitee, and devocioun,/ that thanke I oure Lord Jhesu Crist and his blisful Mooder, and alle the seintes of hevene.' (CT, X. 1084-89)

<sup>17</sup> For the Latin source texts, see Innocent III [Lotario di Segni], *De miseria condicionis humane*, ed. by Robert E. Lewis (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1978), and [pseudo-]Origen, *De Maria Magdalena*, ed. by Rodney K. Delasanta and Constance M. Rousseau, in 'Chaucer's *Orygenes upon the Maudeleyne*: A Translation', *Chaucer Review*, 30. 4 (1996), 319-42 (pp. 324-42).

<sup>18</sup> See Karen Elizabeth Gross, 'Chaucer, Mary Magdalene, and the Consolation of Love', *Chaucer Review*, 41. 1 (2006), 1-36 (p. 5).

This time Chaucer conceives of the two groups of works as those which stand the scrutiny of God's judgement and those which do not, but the members of the groups are largely the same as in the *Legend* prologue (setting aside the mysterious lost *Book of the Lion*). Here Chaucer does not list his religious works in such detail, but does leave an impression of their plenitude; it is not often recognised that after the disappointing disavowal of all of the more popular Chaucerian works, Chaucer retains a considerable body of writing, apparently multiple 'othere bookes' divided into four genres. There is no reason to believe that this amounted to much more than the works which survive alongside those lost which are mentioned in the prologue to the *Legend*, but the sense remains of a writing career which is not solely grounded on poetic achievement.

Chaucer's narrative poems composed prior to the *Canterbury Tales* are all clearly indebted to the tradition of *dits amoureux*. This is most obvious in his four dream visions: the *Book of the Duchess*, *House of Fame*, *Parliament of Fowls*, and *Legend of Good Women* all at least ostensibly concern amorous love – even in the *House of Fame* Chaucer's *persona* is told that he will find love tidings to shape future poetry in Fame's house – and each feature a bewildered *persona* navigating a dream populated by mythic figures. *Troilus and Criseyde* and the story of Palamon and Arcite, which is generally understood to have been directly recycled as the Knight's Tale, are less proximate to the *dit amoureux* tradition because they are not narrated by a participating *persona* aligned with the figure of the poet; the poet tells their entire narrative with a perspective which moves freely between the characters. Critics continue to differ considerably in how far they are willing to read this narrator as a *persona* with any stable characterisation. In particular, the recent work of Anthony Spearing challenges a tradition which draws on the influential work of E. Talbot Donaldson to

read the narrator as possessing a developed *persona*.<sup>19</sup> Nonetheless, both *Troilus* and the Knight's Tale remain stories about love affairs which allude to myths and are persistently invested in distortion and error.

More importantly, almost all of Chaucer's longer poems adapt the tradition of the narrative frame from *dits amoureux*. Chaucer is more consistent than Machaut, Froissart, or Granson in framing those of his poems which do feature an active authorial *persona* in a dream. A dream or reverie had been a common means of constructing the narrative frame, most obviously in the *Roman de la rose*, but also in Machaut's *Dit du vergier* and Froissart's *Paradis d'amour*, but Chaucer employs this tradition systematically where it had only been a common tendency: the *Book of the Duchess* and the *Parliament of Fowls* only feature a short prologue before the dream starts, and end when the *persona* awakes, while the *House of Fame* features a still further truncated prologue and ends incomplete while the dream is still taking place. Only the G Prologue of the *Legend of Good Women* has the narrator awake for much of the poem, as one of its revisions is the introduction of his waking from the dream of the God of Love and Alceste at the end of the prologue, before his composition of the *legendarium* which constitutes the main text. *Troilus and Criseyde* employs a version of the ageing and repentance *topos* to shape its narrative frame: its narrator recounts his narrative to 'ye loveres, that bathen in gladnesse' (*Troilus*, 1. 22) and closes it with an invitation for these lovers to turn to religious orthodoxy as they leave the youthful world of love:

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<sup>19</sup> See A. C. Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity: The Encoding of Subjectivity in Medieval Narratives and Lyrics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005); A. C. Spearing, 'Narrative and Freedom in *Troilus and Criseyde*', in *New Directions in Medieval Manuscript Studies and Reading Practices: Essays in Honour of Derek Pearsall*, ed. by Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, John T. Thompson, and Sarah Baechle (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), pp. 7-33; and E. Talbot Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (London: Athlone Press, 1970). A useful overview of the influence of Donaldson and other responses shaped by it can be found in Barry A. Windeatt, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: Troilus and Criseyde* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992).

O yonge, fresshe folkes, he or she,  
 In which that love up groweth with youre age,  
 Repeyreth hom fro worldly vanyte,  
 And of youre herte up casteth the visage  
 To thilke God that after his ymage  
 Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire,  
 This world that passeth soone as floures faire.

(*Troilus*, 5. 1835-41)

The relationship between this conclusion and the events of the poem has been the subject of generations of scholarship because it is oblique; at Troilus' death the narrator shows him laugh at earth's suffering and then advances this position, which appears to contradict its investment in Troilus and Criseyde's love affair.<sup>20</sup> However, stepping aside from the abruptness of this break a little, it closely resembles the strong change in perspective which generally accompanies the closing of the narrative frame in *dits amoureux*. The poem's narrator does not provide a reason for the change in perspective, as is usually provided through the poet's *persona*, such as the main text having occurred in a dream, being set in his youth, or his having undergone a process of repentance. Nonetheless, the conclusion does emerge from the events of the poem, as Troilus loses Criseyde, dies, and ascends to the heavens; this process is enough to demand another perspective on earthly love. Moreover, it also retrospectively frames the poem's early endorsement of amorous love: here, at the end of the poem, it becomes clear that while the love affair has been treated as a mode of play which is harmless in youth, it should be set in the larger light of salvation history. It is worth noting that this stanza does not forbid the audience from pursuing amorous love altogether, but assumes that they will grow out of it and into a realisation that it offers an insufficient perspective for attention to theological demands.

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<sup>20</sup> The best summary of the critical tradition can be found in Windeatt, *Troilus and Criseyde*, in particular pp. 298-313.



This reading of the stanza in the light of the narrative frame in *dits amoureux* accords closely with the position recently taken by David Aers, which suggests that the Christian injunctions of the narrator are genuine, and demands that the audience attend to the narrative on a different horizon to that which has prevailed within the text.<sup>21</sup> This position is worth reading in concert with Frank Grady's argument that the ending of *Troilus* anticipates the likelihood that an audience would be dissatisfied with a heavenly resolution to Troilus' pain and seek to return to the account of his love affair, and that this anticipation is built into the text and lends its resolution an equivocal dimension.<sup>22</sup> Both of these positions oppose a critical tradition which understands Troilus' death and ascent into the heavens to be deliberately unsatisfying, presented in the understanding that the audience would have to return to the love story to attain any fulfilment at all.<sup>23</sup> In addition, it also differs from the important contribution of Megan Murton, who argues that Troilus' ascent is supposed to be dissatisfying, but in a fashion which is to produce a desire for the mystery of the incarnation addressed in the following stanzas; and, as outlined in Chapter One, Jessica Rosenfeld, who argues that the love affair and the turn to divine love are proposed as separate, but separately laudable, forms of good in the light of the contemporary attention paid to Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and *Politics*.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See David Aers, 'Re-Reading *Troilus* in Response to Tony Spearing', in *Readings in Medieval Textuality: Essays in Honour of A. C. Spearing*, ed. by Cristina María Cervone and D. Vance Smith (Cambridge: Brewer, 2016), pp. 85-95.

<sup>22</sup> See Frank Grady, 'The Boethian Reader of *Troilus and Criseyde*', *Chaucer Review*, 33. 3 (1999), 230-51.

<sup>23</sup> A prominent instance of such a reading is Helen Phillips, 'Love', in *A Companion to Chaucer*, ed. by Peter Brown (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 281-95.

<sup>24</sup> See Murton, *Chaucer's Prayers*, pp. 91-126, and Jessica Rosenfeld, *Ethics and Enjoyment in Late Medieval Poetry: Love after Aristotle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 135-59. A complementary argument to Murton's, suggesting that the frustration of the turn to piety is in itself supposed to frame a form of piety, can be found in Jack Harding Bell, 'Chaucer and the Disconsolations of Philosophy: Boethius, Agency, and Literary Form in Late Medieval Literature' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, Duke University, 2016).

In the light of this, the only narrative poem by Chaucer not to substantially feature a narrative frame was the tale of Palamon and Arcite, assuming that it was substantially the same text as that preserved as the Knight's Tale. The Knight's Tale is framed in the *Canterbury Tales* by its narration by the Knight, but it has no further introduction, and ends with Palamon and Emilie living out their days happily. Theseus' speech in favour of suffering according to the design of the First Mover does work as a kind of retraction, and it closes a story about young lovers with the perspective of a king who has been married for some time by the point at which it occurs, and who is informed by the moral philosophy of his aged father, Egeus. There has, of course, again been sustained and unresolved critical debate about the significance of Theseus' speech to the Knight's Tale; scholars dissent as to whether Theseus should more readily be read as admirably withstanding the vicissitudes of the world as, for instance, in Alastair Minnis and Anthony Spearing's classic arguments, or whether he is oblivious to the violence which underpins the order he represents, driven by the god/planet Saturn, as Lee Patterson and David Wallace have influentially outlined.<sup>25</sup> Nicholas Watson has managed to provocatively promote both positions at once, by arguing that Theseus does apprehend more of the Christian revelation than anyone else in the story, but also employs it to the ends of political expediency.<sup>26</sup> Whichever perspective is taken, Theseus' rule lacks the explicit theological perspective which closes *Troilus*; his speech on the First Mover occurs within the pagan setting of the story and does not reassert the normal conditions of Christian orthodoxy. Obviously, it remains unclear how the tale of Palamon and Arcite was first circulated, but it is possible that it constituted a departure

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<sup>25</sup> See Alastair J. Minnis, *Chaucer and Pagan Antiquity* (Cambridge: Brewer, 1982), and A. C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Patterson, *Subject of History*, and David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

<sup>26</sup> See Watson, 'Chaucer and Langland', p. 376.

from Chaucer's usual practice. Nonetheless, Chaucer is more widely attentive to the situation of his poetic narratives in a space from which they are restricted from having implications regarding the real narrative of salvation history.

Chaucer's consistent employment of the narrative frame in his poetry is complemented by his readiness to attend to the moral demands of salvation history as they pertain to the present moment in his religious translations, and to avoid texts which feature extensive narration, thereby reducing the prospect of his moral writing resembling his poetry. Innocent III's *De miseria* and the pseudo-Origen *De Maria Magdalena* attend to the spiritual implications of a single moment in the midst of salvation history's narrative. *De miseria* asks its audience to contemplate the present state of human life as it heads through a wretched world towards death and judgement, in order to instil a saving fear similar to that addressed in the *Somme le roi* and the *Roman de miserere*, as discussed in Chapter One, while *De Maria Magdalena* isolates the moments before Christ's resurrection, attending to Mary Magdalen's internal state before the turning point in the narrative of salvation history. In the two religious works translated by Chaucer which do employ a sustained narrative, the Life of St Cecilia and the *Boece*, Chaucer takes pains to emphasise that he is not working in his poetic capacity. The Life of St Cecilia is conventionally assumed to survive as the Second Nun's Tale. It provides a close translation into rhyme royal of two authoritative Latin prose *vitae*, combined to produce a narrative which would not have been available elsewhere: the first half, up to Cecilia's interrogation, comes from the widely circulated *Legenda aurea*, while the second half comes from the lections for matins on Cecilia's feast in the Roman breviary, rather than the Sarum breviary – a text which would have been used by the Franciscans in fourteenth-century England.<sup>27</sup> This is prefaced by a

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<sup>27</sup> See Sherry Reames, 'The Second Nun's Prologue and Tale', in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Robert M. Correale and Mary Hamel, 2 vols, Chaucer Studies 28 and 35 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2002-2005), I (2002), 491-528.

prologue against the vice of idleness and a prayer to the Virgin Mary, the second of which is largely drawn from the words of St Bernard of Clairvaux in Dante's *Paradiso*; it is worth noting that neither of these mention the *persona* of the Second Nun. The prologue condemns idleness on terms which recall the amorous poetic tradition, most prominently embodied in the *Roman de la rose*, where Oiseuse / Idleness is the gatekeeper to the garden of Dedit/Delight (*RR*, ll. 582-618). He aims to eschew:

The ministre and the norice unto vices,  
Which that men clepe in Englissh Ydelnesse,  
That porter of the gate is of delices.  
(*CT*, VIII. 1-3)

*Delices* would not be a bad translation for *dedit*, even though it is not the *myrthe* used in fragment A of the English *Rose* translation attributed to Chaucer by William Thynne.<sup>28</sup> Chaucer sets his devotional work on the opposite side of a prominent contemporary dichotomy between labour and idleness to the tradition in which his poetry is grounded.<sup>29</sup> Were this prologue attached to the Life of St Cecilia before its incorporation into the *Canterbury Tales*, these opening lines would raise the tradition of Chaucer's poetry, and neatly set it aside: the labour (*negotium*, not *otium*) which

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<sup>28</sup> See Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Romaunt of the Rose*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 685-767 (ll. 593-628). Dialectal differences indicate that fragments B and C were not composed by Chaucer – see Chaucer, *Rose*, Introduction to Explanatory Notes.

<sup>29</sup> For the heritage of idleness and labour at question here, see the copious material assembled in Brian Vickers, 'Leisure and Idleness in the Renaissance: The Ambivalence of *Otium*', *Renaissance Studies*, 4. 1 (1990), 1-37, and Brian Vickers, 'Leisure and Idleness in the Renaissance: The Ambivalence of *Otium* (Part II)', *Renaissance Studies*, 4. 2 (1990), 107-54. This is applied to a more developed medieval context of labour and love in Gregory M. Sadlek, *Idleness Working: The Discourse of Love's Labor from Ovid through Chaucer and Gower* (Washington D. C.: Catholic University of America, 2004), complemented by the recent Chaucer studies, Adin Esther Lears, 'Something from Nothing: Melancholy, Gossip, and Chaucer's Poetics of Idling in the *Book of the Duchess*', *Chaucer Review*, 48. 2 (2013), 205-21, and Benjamin S. W. Barootes, 'Idleness, Chess, and Tables: Recuperating Fables in Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*', in *Chaucer's Book of the Duchess: Contexts and Interpretations*, ed. by Jamie C. Fumo, *Chaucer Studies*, 45 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2018), pp. 29-50.

Chaucer is undertaking in producing the life from its two Latin sources is not the same thing as his usual writing in response to the *Rose*.

This would have been worth underlining in this text in particular, given that it re-forms its Latin prose sources into the rhyme royal which Chaucer elsewhere employs primarily in amorous poetry, in contrast to the prose into which he translates Boethius' *Consolation*. There is a tendency for his moral verses on Cecilia to sound indistinguishable from his dream fantasy in the *Parliament of Fowls*. A stanza from the Life of St Cecilia and from the *Parliament*, respectively, demonstrate similar narrative exposition:

Valerian is to the place ygon,  
 And right as hym was taught by his lernynge,  
 He foond this hooly olde Urban anon  
 Among the seintes buryeles lotynge.  
 And he anon withouten tariynge  
 Dide his message; and whan that he it tolde,  
 Urban for joye his handes gan up holde.  
 (CT, VIII. 182-89)

This forseide Affrican me hente anon  
 And forth with hym unto a gate broughte,  
 Ryght of a park walled with grene ston;  
 And over the gate, with lettres large iwroughte,  
 There were vers iwriten, as me thoughte,  
 On eyther half, of ful gret difference,  
 Of which I shal yow seyn the pleyn sentence.<sup>30</sup>

Both stanzas start with three clauses joined paratactically ('Valerian is [...] ygon, | And [...] He foond [...] And he anon [...] Did his message'/'Affrican me hente [...] And [...] unto a gate broughte [...] And over the gate [...] There were vers iwriten'), with an A rhyme which allows for *anon* to take a prominent place in this tumble of unravelling incident (in the Cecilia stanza it occurs twice). They also both use the word *right* to

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<sup>30</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*, ed. by Vincent J. DiMarco and Larry D. Benson, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 383-94 (ll. 120-26).

introduce a hypotactic element which adds an incidental detail urged with some insistence – in the Cecilia as an adverb (‘right as hym was taught’) and in the *Parliament* as an adjective (‘unto a gate broughte, | Ryght of a park’). Furthermore, both let this process run up to a caesura in the penultimate line of the stanza (‘And he anon withouten tariynge | Dide his message’/‘There were vers iwriten, as me thoughte, | On eyther half’), before the couplet closes the incident. Without attending to the matter of the two narratives, they appear to be undertaking the same process of following a series of worthy events.

However, where Valerian has found the Pope, the *persona* in the *Parliament of Fowls* has approached the gate to Venus’ garden, the depiction of which is adapted from the ascent of Palemone’s prayer to Venus in Boccaccio’s *Teseida*. In the *Teseida*, this location features Idleness as one of the first figures the prayer meets:

Tra gli albuscelli, ad una fonte allato,  
vide Cupido fabricar saette,  
avendo alli suoi piè l’arco posato,  
le quai sua figlia Voluttà selette  
nell’onde temperava; e assettato  
con lor s’era Ozio, il quale ella vedette  
che con Memoria poi l’aste ferrava  
de’ ferri ch’ella prima temperava.

Among the branches, at a nearby stream,  
[Palamon’s prayer] saw Cupid make arrows,  
Having placed his bow at his feet,  
Which, when chosen, his daughter Will  
Tempered in the stream, and sat  
With them was Idleness, whom she perceived,  
Along with Memory, to put the metal points to the shafts,  
From the metal that Will had first tempered.<sup>31</sup>

In the *Parliament*, Chaucer translates this stanza closely, but cuts Idleness and Memory out in his abridgement of the *ottava rima* into rhyme royal:

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<sup>31</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Teseida della nozze d’Emilia*, ed. by Alberto Limentani, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. by Vittore Branca, 10 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1964-98), II (1964), 231-664 (7. 54).

Under a tre, besyde a welle, I say  
 Cupide, oure lord, his arwes forge and file;  
 And at his fet his bowe al redy lay;  
 And Wille, his doughter, temprede al this while  
 The hevedes in the welle, and with hire wile  
 She couchede hem, after they shulde serve  
 Some for to sle, and some to wounde and kerve.<sup>32</sup>

She may not be invoked, but Idleness lurks around Chaucer's amorous poetry, close to the garden gate through which Scipio Africanus has pushed Chaucer's *persona*, away from the moral consequence of the *Somnium Scipionis* he read before he slept. It is worth remembering that just as Chaucer invokes the *Rose* figure of Idleness only to set her aside at the start of the Life of St Cecilia, in the *Parliament* he is calling up another figure in his depiction of the *persona*, led by Scipio Africanus, reading the inscription over the gate, only to set him aside – Dante at the gate of hell, led by Virgil.<sup>33</sup> In the prefatory material to the Life of St Cecilia, Chaucer proceeds from his warning against Idleness to adapt Bernard of Clairvaux's prayer to the Virgin Mary from Dante's *Paradiso* as an appeal for aid in recounting his matter. Where Dante brought poetry and devotion together, Chaucer rests on his work to ensure that his own favoured poetic tradition is firmly excluded from his devotional work.

#### Chaucer's Double Treatment of Boethius

Chaucer raises the matter of amorous poetry only to discard it at the start of his St Cecilia as a separate pursuit, an alternative to his religious seriousness which he is to set aside on this occasion. In his other moral work to feature extended narrative, his translation of Boethius' *De consolatione philosophiae*, Chaucer addresses the

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<sup>32</sup> Chaucer, *Parliament*, ll. 211-17.

<sup>33</sup> The parallel is widely noted - with particular attention to Chaucer's evasiveness in Cooper, 'Four Last Things', pp. 48-50.

possibility that this narrative might more closely resemble his poetry. As well as translating Boethius' *Consolation*, he incorporated material from it into *Troilus and Criseyde*. In working on these two texts, Chaucer ended up crossing the same ground in both his poetry and his moral translation, a process which he took as an opportunity to clarify the distance between his poetic writing and his religious work.

By the time Chaucer came to it, the *Consolation* was a moral treatise deeply associated with poetry. Sarah Kay and Adrian Armstrong have influentially recognised that it became a nexus for poetic work that explored the relationship between poetry, morality, and desire in the fourteenth-century francophone amorous tradition with which Chaucer aligned himself as a poet; this position is reinforced, with particular attention to the way poets articulate their relationship to the society around them, in monographs by Joanna Summers and Elizabeth Elliott.<sup>34</sup> In preparing his translation, Chaucer relied significantly on the French prose translation produced by Jean de Meun, who had also mined the treatise for material used throughout his continuation of the *Roman de la rose*, and thereby informed much of Chaucer's earlier dream poetry.<sup>35</sup> The *Consolation* was the most poetic moral treatise Chaucer could have translated. The *Consolation* itself features metrical passages, some of which contain poetic myths. However, the standard commentary by Nicholas Trevet (which Chaucer consulted in preparing his translation) displays an anxiety that Boethius' use of certain poetic materials – metre and the myths – should be understood as part of his wider agenda of

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<sup>34</sup> See Adrian Armstrong and Sarah Kay, *Knowing Poetry: Verse in Medieval France from the Rose to the Rhétoriqueurs* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Elizabeth Elliott, *Remembering Boethius: Writing Aristocratic Identity in Late Medieval French and English Literatures* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); and Joanna Summers, *Late-Medieval Prison Writing and the Politics of Autobiography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> For an argument that places the *Consolation* at the heart of Jean de Meun's *Rose*, see Philip Knox, 'Desire for the Good: Jean de Meun, Boethius, and the "Homme devisé en deuz"', in *Medieval Thought Experiments: Poetry, Hypothesis, and Experience in the European Middle Ages*, ed. by Philip Knox, Jonathan Morton, and Daniel Reeve, *Disputatio*, 31 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2018), pp. 223-45.



articulating how a soul might rationally attain consolation, and held aside from any possibility that Boethius is aiming to move the affect or to stimulate the capacity for fantasy. Unlike the other moral treatises Chaucer translated, the *Consolation* has a narrative form: it tells the story of Boethius, who has suffered from his political fall, conversing with Lady Philosophy to attain a degree of consolation. Trevet tries to make it clear that this is a rhetorical mechanism to convey a message of consolation which emerges directly from a single point rather, that of Boethius as a canonised saint and *auctor* who was consoled by his own philosophy in his persecution by Theodoric, rather than from the events of the narrative itself; he presents the treatise's narrative as a way of unfolding this stable moral authority to a less wise audience. Trevet's commentary opens with a short *vita* which explains Boethius' position as an authority, and it only explains the *Consolation's* narrative and dialogue between the figures of Boethius and Philosophy as it turns to address the particulars of the text:

Volens ergo Boecius agere de consolacione philosophica primo inducit personam tam consolacionem indigentem quam personam consolacionem afferentem. Secundo prosequitur de ipsa consolacione prosa secunda SED MEDICINE. Circa primum duo facit. Primo proponit personam consolacione egentem. Secundo inducit personam consolantem prose prima HEC DUM MECUM.

Here Boethius, wanting to address philosophic consolation, first brings in a *persona* lacking consolation instead of a *persona* bringing consolation. Afterwards, this is followed by the consolation in the second prose, SED MEDICINE. At this first stage he does two things. First he brings in a *persona* lacking consolation. Second he brings in the consoling *persona* in the first prose, HEC DUM MECUM.<sup>36</sup>

The dialogue, and the narrative in which it is situated, is secondary to the orchestration of the entire text from a stable point of authority, that of Boethius and his decisions as

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<sup>36</sup> Nicholas Trevet, *Expositio fratris Nicholai Trevethii anglici ordinis praedicatorum super Boetio de consolacione*, ed. by E. T. Silk, Yale Campus Press (2012), <<http://campuspress.yale.edu/trevet/>> [accessed 20 April 2021], 1. Metre 1.

its composer; these decisions are presented as a means of conveying instruction more effectively. This principle is reiterated in Trevet's notes on Boethius' use of pagan myths in the *Consolation*:

Est autem aduertendum hic quod secundum philosophum secundo methaphysice non omnes recipiunt ueritatem per eundem modum tum propter diuersam consuetudinem tum eciam propter diuersam naturam et propter minorem instruccionem in logica. Unde prouenit quod quidem recipiunt melius ueritatem per modum demonstracionis quidam si probetur per auctoritatem quidam si per integumentum fabularum. Unde ut Boecius talibus satisfaciat nunc demonstracionibus nunc auctoritatibus utitur et aliquando fabulas interserit sicut hic.

It should be observed here that, according to the Philosopher in the second book of the *Metaphysics*, not everyone receives the truth by the same means, either on account of different habits, or even of different natures, or of less extensive instruction in logic. Wherefore it occurs that some receive the truth more effectively by the mode of demonstration, some if it is proved by an authority, and some if it comes through the covering of myths. So that he might satisfy such conditions, Boethius uses demonstrations here, authorities there, and inserts some myths, as found in this case.<sup>37</sup>

Trevet is eager to assert that the entirety of the text is a complex work which coheres into a considered scheme of instruction from the authorial figure of Boethius, who employs each aspect of it to ensure that it conveys its moral instruction more effectively, and does so according to his formation as a philosopher, a successor to Aristotle. Any aspect of the text which might appear to have any purpose other than moral formation, and the instilment of consolation through philosophy, is to be taken on trust as part of that coherent scheme even if the improvement which it makes to the treatise may not be immediately apparent to the student of Trevet's commentary.

This reflects a concern in the text of the *Consolation* itself. The work opens poetically, in an echo of lines attributed to Virgil. This appeal to the affect is shut down when Philosophy appears in the first prose section, to bring the real consolation:

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<sup>37</sup> Trevet, 3. Metre 12.

[C]armina qui quondam [s]tudio florente peregi,  
 Flebilis heu mestos co[g]lor inire modos.  
 [E]cce mihi lacere dictant [scr]ibenda camene  
 Et veris helegi fletibus ora rigant.

I, who once worked out songs in flourishing study, alas, am forced to start with sad modes in weeping. See, rending muses dictate to me what should be written, and elegiacs stiffen my face with true tears.<sup>38</sup>

“Quis,” inquit, “has scenecas mereticulas ad hunc egrum permisit accedere que dolores eius non modo ullis remediis non foverent, verum dulcibus insuper alerent venenis? Hee sunt enim que infructuosis affectuum spinis uberem fructibus rationis segetem necant hominumque mentes assuefaciunt morbo, non liberant.”

“Who,” She said, “permitted these theatrical courtesans to attend to this sick man, who do not only fail to attend his pains with any remedies, but feed him with additional sweet poisons? For they are just those who kill the rich harvest of the fruits of reason with the unfruitful thorns of the affects, and fill the minds of men with sickness, rather than freeing them.”<sup>39</sup>

Trevet is not introducing a new premise to Boethius’ project, but he is careful to ensure that this initial rejection of the muses from Boethius himself remains foremost in the mind of anyone attending to the text. This becomes unwieldy at times; on occasion Trevet provides an explanation for the moral significance of Boethius’ use of myths from the poets where it is already explicit. In Book III Metre 12, when Philosophy retells the Orpheus myth, she explains its philosophical weight directly:

“Vos hec fabula respicit  
 Quicumque in supernum diem  
 Mentem ducere queritis.  
 Nam qui Tartarium in specus  
 Victus lumina flexerit,  
 Quicquid precipuum trahit  
 Perdit, dum videt inferos.”

<sup>38</sup> Anicius Manlius Severinus Boethius, *De consolazione philosophiae: Vulgate Latin Text*, in *Sources of the Boece*, ed. by Alastair J. Minnis and Tim William Machan (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 1. Metre 1.

<sup>39</sup> Boethius, 1. Prose 1.

“This fable pertains to you, whoever seeks to lead their mind into the higher day; for the one who turns their conquered eyes into the cave of Tartarus will lose whatever they have drawn from above when they see the places beneath.”<sup>40</sup>

Trevet duplicates this exposition, explaining further that the myth is a figurative account of reason (Orpheus) failing to secure the human affect (Eurydice) when it looks back towards sensuality (the underworld). The commentary demonstrates an anxiety that the *Consolation* might be mistaken for a poetic text in need of exposition like Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, while it asserts that it is a particularly concerted work of moral instruction from a philosopher.

Chaucer’s translation of the *Consolation* picks up on these anxieties. He follows Jean de Meun’s example in translating both the prose and the metres as prose, creating a distance between his own work in verse and the authoritative text of the *Consolation*. Boethius’ verse is part of the rhetoric of his treatise, and it is an aspect of the text which both Jean and Chaucer decline to imitate, differing to Boethius’ own Latin for this aspect of his project. This has the result that both translations signal themselves as acts of homage to an authority which is itself absent from the translation, and can be found complete in its Latin form. Moreover, Chaucer follows Jean in incorporating part of the explication for Boethius’ myths from the commentary tradition into his text. This is material which Jean is most likely to have drawn from a thirteenth-century expansion and revision of Guillaume de Conches’ twelfth-century commentary on the *Consolation*, the latter itself a common ancestor to Trevet and Jean’s texts.<sup>41</sup> This can be seen in their rendition of Philosophy’s exposition of the Orpheus story:

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<sup>40</sup> Boethius, 3. Metre 12.

<sup>41</sup> For the relationship between the commentaries and their use by Chaucer, see Alastair J. Minnis and Lodi Nauta, ‘*More Platonico loquitur*: What Nicholas Trevet Really Did to William of Conches’, in *Chaucer’s Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*,

“Ceste fable appartient a vous touz quiconques couvoitiés metre vostre pensee en la tres grant clarté du souverain bien. Car qui sera si vaincuz que il fichera les yeulx en la fosse d’enfer, c’est a dire, qui metra sa pensee es chosez terriennes, trestout quenque il trait de noble bien celestial, il le pert quant il regarde aus basses chosez de la terre.”

“This fable apertenith to yow alle, whosoevere desireth or seketh to lede his thought into the sovereyn day, that is to seyn, to cleernesse of sovereyn good. For whoso that evere be so overcomen that he ficche his eien into the put of helle, that is to seyn, whose sette his thoughtes in erthly thinges, al that evere he hath drawn of the noble good celestial he lesith it, whanne he looketh the helles, that is to seyn, into lowe thinges of the erthe.”<sup>42</sup>

In both of these renditions, a reproduction of the sense of Boethius’ Latin verse is not enough; it is supplemented with clarifications. ‘C’est a dire’ and ‘that is to seyn’ explain the thrust of Boethius’ moral instruction, aside from its instantiation a representation of what the verse says, to ensure that the audience maintain an awareness of what Boethius’ intention was in composing his treatise, behind the matter of that treatise itself – to make sure that they are consistently aware of the moral instruction the work offers, more immediately than they are drawn into the work’s mechanics.

At the same time as he produced his translation of the *Consolation*, however, Chaucer was working on *Troilus and Criseyde*, a heavily altered and augmented translation of Boccaccio’s *Filostrato*. Chaucer introduces material from Boethius’ *Consolation* without any precedent in Boccaccio’s poem, but the mode in which he does so reflects an interest in recuperating the kind of narrative machinery which Trevet’s commentary attempts to clear away as the proper material for poetry. In his prologue to

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ed. by Alastair J. Minnis, *Chaucer Studies*, 18 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993), pp. 1-34, and Alastair J. Minnis, ‘Chaucer’s Commentator: Nicholas Trevet and the *Boece*’, in *Chaucer’s Boece and the Medieval Tradition of Boethius*, ed. by Alastair J. Minnis, *Chaucer Studies*, 18 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1993), pp. 83-166.

<sup>42</sup> Jean de Meun, *Li Livres de confort de philosophie*, in *Sources of the Boece*, ed. by Alastair J. Minnis and Tim William Machan (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2005), 3. Metre 12; Geoffrey Chaucer, *Boece*, ed. by Ralph Hanna and Traugott Lawler, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 395-470 (3. Metre 12).

the *Filostrato*, Boccaccio explains how he managed to prevent himself from dying of sorrow at his lady's absence by composing the poem: 'E il modo fu questo: di dovere in persona di alcuno passionato sì come io era e sono, cantando narrare li miei martiri' (And the means was this, that I should tell of my martyrdom singing in the *persona* of someone impassioned like I was and am).<sup>43</sup> Troilus' story suits Boccaccio because Troilus is the *persona* of a man driven by his passions. Boethius' philosophy argues that all misfortune is beneficial in the eyes of divine providence because it leads the sufferer to realise the instability of earthly love and look to the love of the First Mover. In the light of such thought, the fact that Troilus is a 'persona di alcuno passionato' also makes him a 'personam [...] consolacionem indigentem', the *persona* of a man lacking consolation because he has not attained this realisation.<sup>44</sup> Boccaccio proposes to tell the story of Troilus because it gives him the opportunity to show impassioned suffering in detail, with the hope that its rehearsal can help him bear it. Chaucer does not retain this perspective in his adaptation – there is no evidence to make us certain that he had a copy of Boccaccio's prologue to the poem. Instead he provides a depiction of himself rehearsing a true lover's suffering from a distance as a figure of lower status who is diffident about his own love (*Troilus*, 1. 15-21) – a *persona* informed by *dits amoureux*, resembling Guillaume de Machaut's onlooker on the lover's dispute in the *Jugement du roy de Behaigne*. Ultimately, this does not alter the reason for which Chaucer tells Troilus' story. He preserves the prospect that Troilus' love story might match the experiences of a lover and therefore help them bear their suffering – his narrator simply

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<sup>43</sup> Giovanni Boccaccio, *Il Filostrato*, ed. by Vittore Branca, in *Tutte le opere di Giovanni Boccaccio*, ed. by Vittore Branca, 10 vols (Milan: Mondadori, 1964-98), II (1964), 25-228. (pp. 26-27).

<sup>44</sup> Trevet, 1. Metre 1. The parallel between suffering in Fortune and suffering in amorous love is intriguingly echoed in J. Allen Mitchell, 'Romancing Ethics in Boethius, Chaucer, and Levinas: Fortune, Moral Luck, and Erotic Adventure', *Comparative Literature*, 57. 2 (2005), 101-16.

declines that he could ever be a lover of such status. Troilus' story is worth retelling as a poem because it features a figure who lacks consolation in his passions.

Chaucer's use of material from the *Consolation* in *Troilus* draws on Boethius' realisation of his 'personam [...] consolacionem indigentem'. Where this *persona* is quickly met with its opposite, the 'personam consolantem' of Philosophy, Chaucer takes material from Boethius to enrich his depiction of the way in which Troilus suffers, and ultimately to intensify his presentation of Troilus as a figure without consolation.<sup>45</sup> Chaucer's most extensive introduction of Boethian material takes the form of an episode he inserts before Criseyde has to leave Troy to join her father in the Greek camp. Pandarus finds Troilus in a temple, lamenting his treatment by fortune, and ratiocinating as to whether he ever had free will in the course of his love affair given God's complete foreknowledge, on terms translated from the Boethius' *persona*'s problem in Book V of the *Consolation*. Where Boethius showed the *persona* of Philosophy bringing consolation, in this case there is no Philosophy to explain that the terms on which he reasons are insufficient to apprehend the simplicity of the First Mover's existence in an eternal present:

“But certes yif we myghten han the jugement of the devyne thocht, as we ben parsoners of resoun, ryght so as we hav demyd that it byhovith that ymaginacioun and wit ben byneth the resoun, ryght so wolde we demen that it were ryghtfull thing that mannys resoun oughte to summytten itself to ben byneth the devyne thought.”<sup>46</sup>

Lacking this reply, Troilus effectively remains stuck at Book V, Metre 3 in the *Consolation* in his dilemma. He does end his examination of the problem by crying to Jove to help him in his problem, approaching the solution that he should resign from his own attempt at rational comprehension:

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<sup>45</sup> Trevet, 1. Metre 1.

<sup>46</sup> Chaucer, *Boece*, 5. prose 5.

“And over al this, yet sey I more herto:  
 That right as whan I wot ther is a thyng,  
 Iwys, that thyng moot nedfully be so;  
 Ek right so, whan I woot a thyng comyng,  
 So mot it come; and thus the bifallyng  
 Of thynges that ben wist before the tyde,  
 They mowe nat ben eschued on no syde.”

Thanne seyde he thus: “Almyghty Jove in trone,  
 That woost of al thys thyng the sothfastnesse,  
 Rewe on my sorwe: or do me deyen sone,  
 Or bryng Criseyde and me fro this destresse!”  
 (*Troilus*, 4. 1072-82)

With only the faintest of seams – a stanza break and ‘Thanne seyde he thus’ – *Troilus* moves from a perspective which invites the moral philosophy of Boethius’ treatise to a return to his position of suffering. The difficulty which develops into philosophical resolution in Boethius’ work is included in the poem, but that resolution is denied. Where *dits amoureux* explore poetry as a study in distortion, a mode which frustrates the pursuits of philosophy, here the pursuit of philosophy is deliberately frustrated in order to produce poetry.

Megan Murton has recently argued that *Troilus*’ prayer demonstrates that he has a mature and circumspect perspective on his suffering, or at least as mature as is available to him as a pagan: she draws attention to the unresolved question of how to attain grace in Boethius’ *Consolation*, and its dependence on the soul seeking grace through prayer.<sup>47</sup> Murton argues that Chaucer’s prayer to Christ at the end of the *Troilus* indicates a dissatisfaction with a Boethian schema which concludes with *Troilus*’ laughing ascent from the world he once loved; she understands this to leave a thirst for a loving and incarnate God. This sophisticated reading is based on the complexity of the *Consolation*, which Murton reads as a site exploring the conflict between the

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<sup>47</sup> See Murton, *Chaucer’s Prayers*, pp. 91-126.



consolation promised by Philosophy and a human's ability to attain it.<sup>48</sup> Eleanor Johnson has approached *Troilus* with an eye to the complexity of the *Consolation* in a slightly different way, arguing that the *Consolation*'s demonstration of how a formal encounter with literature might change a suffering *persona* is revised into a demonstration of how Troilus' story changes the poem's narrator.<sup>49</sup> Both Murton and Johnson's readings are met with the obstacle that any transformation in Troilus' suffering or the narrator's relationship to his matter is left until the end of the poem, at which point the love story's narrative frame is sharply closed. Prior to that point, Chaucer's introduction of philosophical material from Boethius adds a new level of detail to the portrayal of Troilus' suffering he draws from Boccaccio, rather than revising the terms on which it is composed.

When Troilus' suffering does come to end, it does so very abruptly. Chaucer departs from Boccaccio's *Filostrato* by inserting a depiction of Troilus' ascent to the heavens after his death, where he looks down on the world in which he suffered and laughs. This stands in contrast to Boccaccio's depiction of Troilus' death, which cuts Troilus' story short through unremedied violence. For Boccaccio, Troilus is the sharp example of a failure who faced betrayal in love and lost everything as a result:

e dopo lungo stallo,  
avendone già morti più di mille,  
miseramente un dì l'uccise Achille.

Cotal fine ebbe il mal concetto amore  
di Troiolo in Criseida, e cotal  
fine ebbe il miserabile dolore  
di lui, al qual non fu mai altro eguale;  
cotal fine ebbe il lucido splendore  
che lui servava al solio reale;

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<sup>48</sup> Murton is indebted to the compelling reading in John Marenbon, *Boethius* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

<sup>49</sup> See Eleanor Johnson, *Practising Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: Ethics and the Mixed Form in Chaucer, Gower, Usk, and Hoccleve* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. 55-121.

cotal fine ebbe la speranza vana  
di Troiolo in Criseida villana.

And after a long time, with him having already slain more than a thousand,  
Achilles one day wretchedly slew him.

Such an end had the ill-conceived love of Troilus for Cressida, and such an end  
had his wretched sorrow, to which no other was equal; such an end had the  
bright splendour which he promised to the royal throne; such an end had the  
vain hopes which Troilus placed in the unworthy Cressida.<sup>50</sup>

For Chaucer, the end of Troilus' story is not a capitulation, the underlining of his failure  
which brings further a further edge of pathos to a story the narrator can use to present  
his own suffering in love. Instead, it is the point at which Troilus at last succeeds.

Chaucer confronts Boccaccio's *cotal fine* stanza:

Swich fyn hath, lo, this Troilus for love!  
Swich fyn hath al his grete worthynesse!  
Swich fyn hath his estat real above!  
Swich fyn his lust, swich fyn hath his noblesse!  
Swych fyn hath false worldes brotelnesse!  
And thus bigan his lovyng of Criseyde,  
As I have told, and in this wise he deyde.  
(*Troilus*, 5. 1828-34)

Chaucer's stanza is almost as brusque as Boccaccio's. It still summarises Troilus' career  
in love as ending in waste, even emphasising the emptiness of his pursuit in the closing  
rhyme *Criseyde/deyde*, which matches Troilus' desire with his own loss, in place of the  
violent accusation of Boccaccio's *speranza vana/Criseida villana*. However, it follows  
Troilus' ascent to the heavens and his laughter at his suffering on earth, so the end to  
which it refers is different. His death is not just waste, but a reform of his priorities; this  
may be a shocking end for his love, worthiness, estate royal, desire, and nobleness, but  
it is the best end available when confronted with the world's brittleness. As long as he  
existed in poetry, Troilus' existence was a form of suffering; once he is out of poetry,

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<sup>50</sup> Boccaccio, *Filostrato*, 8. stanzas 27-28.

and out of the narrative frame, he does not have to suffer any more and reaches a mode of consolation similar to that explored by Boethius. Rather than attempting to accomplish the same work as Boethius through his poetry, Chaucer can be seen as slowing Boethius' work, drawing out the capacity of the poetic to raise the passions, which he had avoided in his translation of the *Consolation*, into a long, pleasurable encounter with Troilus' experiences in love, and leaving the philosophy for the end, once the poetry has done its work. At that end point, the philosophy sits beside the poetry, and invites an audience to reconsider it without changing the terms on which the poetry itself operates.

#### Usk's Discontent

The distinction which Chaucer draws between the domains of poetry and moral consequence was stark enough to trouble one of his earliest documented readers. In the mid-1380s, Thomas Usk composed the *Testament of Love*, a prose work which is deeply indebted to Boethius' *Consolation*, and shows an admiration of Chaucer's poetry and *Boece*. Usk has the *persona* who brings consolation in the *Testament*, Lady Love, invoke Chaucer as a great authority, 'the noble philosophical poete in Englissh [spe]che'.<sup>51</sup> While Usk employs Chaucer's translation of the *Consolation* in parts of the *Testament*, it is as a poet that Love praises Chaucer, and to *Troilus* that she directs the suffering Usk-*persona* for consolation in his doubts about how God's perfect foreknowledge and his own free will could co-exist:

“He,” quod she, “in a treatise that he made of my servant Troylus, hath this mater touched, and at the ful this questyon assoyled. Certaynly his noble sayenges can I not amende; in goodnes of gentyll manlyche speche, without any maner of nycite of st[o]rieres ymagynacion, in wytte and in good reason of

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<sup>51</sup> Thomas Usk, *Testament of Love*, ed. by Gary W. Shawver, based on the work of John F. Leyerle (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 3. 4.

sentence he passeth al other makers. In the *Boke of Troylus*, the answe to thy questyon mayste thou lerne.”<sup>52</sup>

This raises a problem, because Chaucer did present Boethius’ solution to this problem in his *Consolation* but avoided doing so when he reworked the same material in *Troilus*. As discussed above, Chaucer’s exploration of the problem of omniscience and free will in *Troilus* is entirely directed towards ‘st[o]rrieres ymagynacion’, the recreation in narrative of a *persona*’s suffering from the passions, without attention to the good guidance which could free him until the narrative has run its course. Usk sets up Chaucer as a poetic authority who carries the weight of a Latin curricular *auctor* in his poetry, rather than one who translates the works of *auctores* as an occupation distinct from his poetry. This is a disquieting evasion of Chaucer’s own practice, and it invites consideration alongside other cases in which scholars have found Usk to be a pronounced misreader: Paul Strohm and Marion Turner have influentially found Usk to be a hapless figure, haunted by the vulnerability of his political positions, enchanted by Chaucer’s poetry and (presumably) political good favour, and ensnared in his own alignment of spiritual virtue and worldly prestige.<sup>53</sup> However, recent work by Ian Johnson and Melinda Nielsen has suggested that we might view Usk as an attentive and informed recipient of Boethian tradition at the very least, and it is worth extending such a readiness to meet Usk on his own literary ground to this aggressive reorganisation of Chaucer’s literary identity.<sup>54</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Usk, 3. 4.

<sup>53</sup> See Paul Strohm, ‘Politics and Poetics: Usk and Chaucer in the 1380s’, in *Literary Practice and Social Change in Britain, 1380-1530*, ed. by Lee Patterson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 83-112, with Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), and Paul Strohm, *Hochon’s Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 145-60; Marion Turner, *Chaucerian Conflict: Languages of Antagonism in Late Fourteenth-Century London* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), pp. 93-126.

<sup>54</sup> See Ian Johnson, ‘Authority and the Translation of Boethian Selves: John Walton, James I, and Thomas Usk’, in *Translation and Authority – Authorities in Translation*,

On a very basic level this can be seen in the conception of the *Testament*. One aspect of the text which has troubled critics is its sheer similarity to Boethius' *Consolation*, given that it is not a translation of Boethius' text and assertively changes certain features of it: Lady Philosophy is replaced with Lady Love, the circumstances of Boethius' fall from grace are replaced with Usk's own, and the attainment of philosophical stability through an apprehension of the First Mover's wisdom is replaced with the 'knotte [of lasting love] in the herte', which the suffering Usk associates with a certain 'Margaryte perl' for whom he longs and whose favour he seeks. However, the proximity of the *Testament* to the *Consolation* can be misleading. Like the *Consolation*, the *Testament* culminates in a dialogue on the difficulty of reconciling God's foreknowledge with free will, which ends in a recognition of the sheer alterity of God's knowledge. This discussion in the *Testament* is not derived from the *Consolation* but is an inventive translation and adaptation of Anselm's *De concordia praescientiae et praedestinationis et gratiae dei cum libero arbitrio*.<sup>55</sup> Rather than aping Chaucer's translation work, Usk translates another body of difficult Latin philosophy which was not available in English. He emulates one of the more painstaking parts of Chaucer's writing career and does so without drawing attention to what he is doing; it is likely that an unschooled audience would assume that this discussion is indeed derived from Boethius.

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ed. by Michèle Goyens and Pieter de Leemans, *The Medieval Translator/Traduire au moyen âge*, 16 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), pp. 97-113; Melinda Nielsen, 'Scholastic Persuasion in Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love*', *Viator*, 42. 2 (2011), 183-203; and Melinda Nielsen, 'Being Boethius: Vitae, Politics, and Troth in Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love*', *Studies in Philology*, 115. 1 (2018), 25-47.

<sup>55</sup> This is most extensively discussed in George Sanderlin, 'Usk's *Testament of Love* and St Anselm', *Speculum*, 17. 1 (1942), 69-73; a useful account is also provided in R. Allen Shoaf, 'St. Anselm's *De concordia* (Sections Relevant to *TL*)', in Thomas Usk, *The Testament of Love*, ed. by R. Allen Shoaf (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998), <<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/shoaf-usk-the-testament-of-love>> [accessed 21 April 2021].

This approach to translation does involve a degree of alteration and receptiveness to the poetic in a way which is foreign to Chaucer's translation work. George Sanderlin recognised that Usk re-aligns Anselm's exploration of the will's rectitude with his own end of love, set at the centre the *Testament* in the consoling *persona* of Lady Love, and deeply associated with the Margaret Pearl whom Usk's suffering *persona* seeks.<sup>56</sup> Moreover, since the nineteenth century, scholars have recognised that Usk's *Testament* is underpinned by a thread of allusions to *Troilus and Criseyde*, and with particular acuity Andrew Galloway has observed that the 'knotte in the herte' which Love presents to the suffering Usk as the stable love which can console him is a counter-balance to Criseyde's abandonment of Troilus:

But God it wot, er fully monthes two,  
 She was ful fer fro that entencioun!  
 For bothe Troilus and Troie town  
 Shal knotteles thoroughout hire herte slide;  
 For she wol take a purpos for t'abide.  
 (*Troilus*, 5. 766-70)<sup>57</sup>

In the *Testament*, Usk proposes a body of philosophical and moral guidance through the figure of Love that can convey consolation, and in this respect his work differs distinctly from Chaucer's poetry. However, that consolation is proposed as the remedy for a loss which is emblematically the kind of suffering which Chaucer set forth in his poetry. Melinda Nielsen has suggested that Usk's *persona* should be read as a distinct development of Boethius, closer to the struggling, flawed *personae* found in *Piers Plowman* or the *Confessio amantis*, rather than a failed reproduction of the Boethius *persona* from the *Consolation*, but there is a profound sense in which Usk is working

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<sup>56</sup> See Sanderlin, p. 70; for a fuller treatment of Usk's approach to the translation, see Stephen Medcalf, 'Transposition: Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love*', in *The Medieval Translator: The Theory and Practice of Translation in the Middle Ages*, ed. by Roger Ellis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1989), pp. 181-95.

<sup>57</sup> See Andrew Galloway, 'Private Selves and the Intellectual Marketplace in Late Fourteenth-Century England: The Case of the Two Usks', *New Literary History*, 28. 2 (1997), 291-318 (p. 297).

successfully like Boethius in the *Testament*. In seeing what poetry can do as an instrumental form – an appeal to the affect which can advance a moral agenda – Usk employs his references to Chaucer’s poetry in imitation of the rhetorical work which Nicholas Trevet saw taking place through the fictional narrative dialogues and the use of myths in the *Consolation*. Where Trevet saw Boethius employing this affect to move his audience to leave their passions by means of an appeal to those passions, Usk employs it to invite his audience to a form of compassion for his sufferings based on the affect instilled in them by Chaucer’s poetry. In itself, this is not enough to justify his reading of Chaucer as a philosophical poet; it does, however, bring Chaucer’s poetry into the purview of philosophy on terms which do not violate Chaucer’s division between his modes of writing.

Nonetheless, Usk’s use of poetry in the *Testament* runs more deeply than this, with implications for his reading of Chaucer. Where Boethius is consoled by the figure of Lady Philosophy, who directs him to the Platonic First Mover, Usk’s scheme of consolation is less tidy; Usk is consoled by Lady Love, who directs him to the ‘knotte in the herte’, which the suffering Usk associates with the ‘Margaryte perl’. It is clear that, historically, the consolation which Usk hoped for in his imprisonment was political favour following his association with John of Northampton and subsequent collaboration with Nicholas Brembre’s faction – favour which he received from Richard II when he was appointed as a Sergeant-at-Arms in 1385 and Under-Sheriff for Middlesex in 1387. His search for a the ‘knotte in the herte’ via the instruction of Love can be readily aligned with this need to demonstrate a capacity for lasting loyalty and spiritual integrity. The place of the ‘Margaryte perl’ is less clear, because the term *marguerite* is profoundly polysemous and readily crosses genre boundaries.<sup>58</sup> Lucy

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<sup>58</sup> For a tidy summary of this distinction see Galloway, ‘Private Selves’; for the difficulty of the pearl, see R. Allen Shoaf, Introduction to Thomas Usk, *The Testament of Love*, ed. by R. Allen Shoaf (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1998),

Lewis feasibly suggested that the pearl could be a cipher for Lady Margaret de Lisle, the wife of Sir Thomas Berkeley - famous for his patronage of John Trevisa - given that Usk recounts how Love led him to her on an island he reached in a storm.<sup>59</sup> As good as this suggestion might be, not only can it not be proven, it is always hostage to the complexity of the figure of the pearl itself. There is an artistry in this. The passage in which Usk recounts how he left home, came to the sea and the island, and was shown to the Margaret pearl by Lady Love is extended and opaque. Its opening is an inverted version of the *reverdie topos*:

“In tyme whan Octobre his leave gynneth take, and Novembre sheweth hym to syght, whan bernes ben ful of goodes as is the nutte on every halke, and than good londe tyllers gynne shape for the erthe, with great travayle, to bringe forthe more corne to mannes sustenance ayenste the nexte yeres folowyng, in suche tyme of plentie, he that hath an home, and is wyse, lyste not to wander mervayles to seche, but he be constrayned or excited. Oft the lothe thyng is doone by excytacion of other mannes opynyon, whiche wolden fayne have myn abydyng take in herte. Ofluste to travayle and se the wyndyng of the erthe in that tyme of wynter, by woodes that large stretes werne in, by smale pathes that swyne and hogges hadden made, as lanes with ladels their maste to seche, I walked thynkyne alone a wonder great whyle” [...]<sup>60</sup>

This recalls *dits amoureux*: an inversion of the *topos* can be found in Machaut’s *Jugement du roi de Navarre* and Froissart’s *Joli buisson de jeunesse*, each of which open in bad weather instead of on a spring morning, and concern matters of moral severity – the devastation of the plague and the demands of increasing age – before they turn to a *locus amoenus* for poetic play.<sup>61</sup> The inversion of the spring opening in Usk’s

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<<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/shoaf-usk-the-testament-of-love>> [accessed 21 April 2021].

<sup>59</sup> See Lucy Lewis, ‘The Identity of Margaret in Thomas Usk’s *Testament of Love*’, *Medium Ævum*, 68. 1 (1999), 63-72.

<sup>60</sup> Usk, 1. 3.

<sup>61</sup> See Guillaume de Machaut, *Le Jugement dou roy de Navarre*, in *Guillaume de Machaut: The Complete Poetry and Music*, ed. by R. Barton Palmer et al., 13 vols (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2016-), I (2016), <<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/guillaume-de-machaut-complete-poetry-and-music-volume1>> [accessed 20 April 2021], ll. 1-36; and Jean Froissart, *Le Joli*



case is slightly different, depicting an autumn rather than bad weather itself; Myra Stokes and V. J. Scattergood importantly drew attention to the fact that this was widely regarded as an inauspicious season for a journey, emphasising the urgency of Usk's travel to the island.<sup>62</sup> However, as the narrative of Usk's encounter with the Margaret pearl progresses, it becomes apparently allegorical. On the paths he meets wild beasts:

“Than, er I was ware, I neyghed to a see banke, and for ferde of the beestes, ‘shypcrafte,’ I cryde. For lady, I trowe ye wete wel yourself, nothyng is worse than the beestes that shulden ben tame, if they catche her wyldenesse and gynne ayen wexe ramage.

“Thus, forsothe, was I aferde, and to shyppe me hyed. Than were there ynowe to lache myn handes and drawe me to shyppe, of whiche many I knewe wel the names. Syght was the first, lust was another, thought was the thirde, and wyl eke was there a mayster. These broughten me within borde of this shyppe of traveyle.”<sup>63</sup>

When Usk meets the ship it becomes apparent that this is an allegorical narrative of a sort, given the ship's crew. However, without clear allegory for the beasts or sufficient detail as to the circumstances of the journey which Usk's *persona* is on, this allegory remains opaque. It is unclear whether the *shyppe of traveyle* is a ship which is to stand for travail allegorically, or one which is only equated with travail contingently in that moment. As addressed in Chapter One, the *dit amoureux* tradition is grounded in a resistance to the decipherment of poetic figures, in a philosophical environment where that decipherment was predominant. Here Usk threatens to return to that decipherment in his journey, but does not complete the turn; it remains unclear which elements of the events he relates can be translated out of figurative terms, and how coherent an account

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*buisson de jonece*, ed. by Anthime Fourrier, Textes littéraires français, 222 (Geneva: Droz, 1975), ll. 859-67.

<sup>62</sup> See Myra Stokes and V. J. Scattergood, ‘Travelling in November: Sir Gawain, Thomas Usk, Charles of Orléans and the *De re militari*’, *Medium Ævum*, 53. 1 (1984), 78-83.

<sup>63</sup> Usk, 1. 3.

could be produced from this approach. The Margaret pearl is the culmination of this obscurity:

“But, lady, as ye me lad, I was ware bothe of beestes and of fysshes a great nombre throngyng togyder, amonge whiche a muskel in a blewe shel had enclosed a Margaryte perle, the moste precious and best that ever toforne came in my syght. And ye tolden yourselfe that ylke jewel in his kynde was so good and so vertuous, that her better shulde I never fynde, al sought I thereafter to the worldes ende.”<sup>64</sup>

The pearl is given attributes by Lady Love – she is good, virtuous, and unsurpassable – but these only leave the central weight of the pearl’s meaning unresolved. The Usk-*persona*’s account of his journey remains wildly over-signified, even if we understand it to denote the equation of the Margaret pearl with Margaret de Lisle.

A strong tradition of Usk criticism would suggest that this is due to the lack of clarity in Usk’s arrangement of his material, but it might be worth reading this as a provocative challenge to the limitations on the appeal to poetic affect which Nicholas Trevet observes in the *Consolation*. Where Trevet insists that Boethius uses poetic material with caution, as a rhetorical strategy to move his audience towards taking consolation seriously, Usk’s work in the *Testament* can suggest that a pursuit of consolation through suffering might not only be understood through philosophical rationalism shorn of the affect used to reach that point, but alternatively through the pursuit of desires which remain obscure, and which emerge from the experience of reading poetic material – that the image of the Margaret Pearl is, in a sense, more comprehensible than the concept of the *summum bonum*. In this process, Usk’s reading of Chaucer has shaped his own affective landscape, and is part of his tutelage by Love; for his *persona* to realise this in the fiction of the *Testament* is not necessarily to misunderstand Chaucer’s literary priorities, but to find that Chaucer’s priorities do not

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<sup>64</sup> Usk, 1. 3.

withstand the reception of his work. Once his writing has been received and digested by Usk, it is not readily distinguishable into a distinct poetic corpus and a corpus of translated *auctores*. This was not an inevitable process – it does not, in fact, resemble the wider development of Chaucer’s reputation after his death, which came to rest primarily on his poetic work. Nonetheless, it indicates the precarity of Chaucer’s separation between his two writing careers, particularly when faced with a reader who was not so dedicated to poetry as a space for the exploration of distortion without recourse to salvation history. When met with that austere separation, Usk was willing to produce a project as ambitious as Gower’s moral poetry – a form of philosophical treatise which acknowledged that moral guidance could be founded on poetry’s oblique figurations.

## Chapter 4

## Revising the Narrative Frame

The three major English writers to take up the *dit amoureux* tradition – Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe – each composed *pastoralia* alongside their poetry, which set significant pressure on the narrative frame’s ability to protect poetry from the demands of moral consequence. Clanvowe did not live long enough to develop a response to this tension, while Chaucer and Gower approached it very differently. Gower developed a mode of poetry which was able to work in concert with moral seriousness, and which turned to *dit amoureux* traditions to brace itself against them as irresponsible forms of poetry; Chaucer deliberately sustained a mode of moral writing and a mode of poetry as separate pursuits, uniting them only in his wider characterisation of himself as a writer. In the late 1380s, however, both Chaucer and Gower took a new approach to this problem in their work on the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio amantis*. In these poems they employ a narrative frame, but one which is not fully sealed in the traditional fashion. The two story collections include explicitly religious material which demands a response on salvation history’s terms inside the framed space for poetry, and alongside more playful material. The presence of the narrative frame maintains this as a space for play, but the inclusion of material with serious moral horizons changes the character of that play.

This development appears to have emerged out of a dialogue between Chaucer and Gower. The *Confessio* is likely to predate the *Tales* slightly, and in each collection the poet refers to the work of his counterpart. By engaging in this correspondence, Gower made a significant concession to worldly poetry, given the diligence with which he had established his role as a morally responsible poet over the previous decades, and presented that role as a corrective to the *dit amoureux* tradition. Chaucer responded to

this movement in Gower's career with remarkable ingenuity in the *Canterbury Tales*. Not only does he follow Gower's work in the *Confessio* to include material pertinent to salvation history inside the narrative frame of his poem, he also departs from the subject of amorous love, while continuing to follow the conventions of *dits amoureux*. Chaucer presents a story collection which admits a wider company of narrators than generally found in *dits amoureux*, and arranges his stories according to the criteria which Gower had previously used to develop moral poetry: satire, the structure of society, and the prospect of judgement. Chaucer presents a collection of narrators aligned with their position in society, and accompanied by a prospect of that position being virtuously or viciously fulfilled; he then filters this through the perceptions of his own *persona* figure, who is not in love, but shares the hapless illusioned qualities which often distort the vision of a *persona* in the *dit amoureux* tradition. This produces a space for play in narration, yet this play remains an exploration of moral material. The poem's audience is left with the prospect of a set of moral judgements to be made regarding the company, but unsure on what grounds it should make them or how far they might carry weight beyond the poem's play.

#### Gower and Chaucer's Dialogue

From the late 1380s onwards, Chaucer and Gower worked on three story collections in sequence, the *Legend of Good Women*, the *Confessio amantis*, and the *Canterbury Tales*. These works have a remarkable amount in common and articulate a correspondence between Chaucer and Gower as they worked on them. The details of what can be known about this exchange provide a vital context for the alteration of the narrative frame which took place in the *Confessio* and the *Tales*. All three are arranged according to a religious premise. The *Legend of Good Women* is an amorous

*legendarium* of women who were martyrs to love, composed in penance to the God of Love; the *Confessio amantis* is the confession of a desperate lover to Venus' priest, Genius, who is guided through the Seven Deadly Sins in a dialogue featuring *exempla*; and the *Canterbury Tales* is a collection of stories told by pilgrims on the road to St Thomas' shrine, each of which intersects with their social standing and their occupation of that standing. These poems also each stand in the *dit amoureux* tradition: the frame stories of the *Legend* and the *Confessio* are set in the service of Cupid and Venus, respectively, while all three poems attend to distortion and the limited perspectives of *persona* figures, at least in their frame stories, and retell Ovidian myths. Chaucer and Gower even relate many of the same stories across these collections: the *Confessio* is the most comprehensive, sharing the tales of Piramus and Thisbe, Dido and Aeneas, Lucretia, Theseus and Ariadne, Procne and Philomela, and Phyllis and Demophon with the *Legend of Good Women*, and those of Constance, Florent, Virginius and Virginia, Apollo and the crow, the death of Hercules, the madness of Nebuchadnezzar, and the death of Alexander the Great with the *Canterbury Tales*, in the respective form of the Man of Law's Tale, the Wife of Bath's Tale, the Physician's Tale, the Manciple's Tale, and the compendious Monk's Tale.

Further to this, each poem employs a narrative frame derived from the *dit amoureux* tradition. The *Legend's* prologue sees Chaucer's *persona* condemned by the God of Love for offences committed in his earlier poetry, saved by the intercession of Alceste, and sentenced to produce a *legendarium* of women loyal in love. This trial of the poet's *persona* over positions taken in his earlier work clearly recalls the trial of Guillaume de Machaut's *persona* in the *Jugement du roy de Navarre* regarding the conclusion of his *Jugement du roy de Behaigne*. Book I of the *Confessio* sees Gower depart from his role as a moral poet, reiterated in the poem's Prologue, to adopt the *persona* of a lover, Amans, while the end of the poem sees Venus release him from his

fruitless love and show him that he is John Gower, an old man who cannot reasonably be a lover, in a mediation between the age and amorous state of the *persona* figure which recalls Jean Froissart's *Joli buisson de jeunesse*. The *Canterbury Tales* is closed by the Parson's final tale, begun at nightfall, which proves to be a treatise on confession to lead the company – and the poem's audience – to the celestial Jerusalem, the goal of the true spiritual pilgrimage, followed by Chaucer's Retraction of his poetry. This turn to a devotional genre at the end of the space for poetic play resembles the concluding prayer to the Virgin Mary which closes the *Joli buisson*. The use of framing devices in these poems has received critical attention from varied perspectives, including recent studies by Lynn Shutters and Candace Barrington, which have examined its ability to mediate the implications of classical material and the relationship between *persona* figures.<sup>1</sup> John Burrow, Anthony Spearing, and Alastair Minnis have specifically contextualised the use of framing devices in these poems with reference to *dits amoureux*, but their approach has generally formed part of an attempt to situate the position of Chaucer and Gower's entire poetic practice in these wider francophone horizons, rather than pertaining to an examination of the *Legend*, *Confessio*, and *Tales* as a set of three poems which develop the tradition in a specific and shared way.<sup>2</sup> Aside from this there has been a tendency to treat the *Legend*, the *Confessio*, and the *Tales* as a group of associated story collections, but removed from any specific francophone or

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<sup>1</sup> See Lynn Shutters, 'Confronting Venus: Classical Pagans and their Christian Readers in John Gower's *Confessio amantis*', *Chaucer Review*, 48. 1 (2013), 38-65; and Candace Barrington, 'Personas and Performance in Gower's *Confessio amantis*', *Chaucer Review*, 48. 4 (2014), 414-33.

<sup>2</sup> See J. A. Burrow, 'The Portrayal of Amans in *Confessio amantis*', in *Gower's Confessio amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. by Alastair J. Minnis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983), pp. 5-24; J. A. Burrow, 'Gower's *Confessio amantis* and Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as *dits*', in *Readings in Medieval Textuality: Essays in Honour of A. C. Spearing*, ed. by Cristina Maria Cervone and D. Vance Smith (Cambridge: Brewer, 2016), pp. 157-68; A. C. Spearing, *Medieval Autographies: The 'I' of the Text* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012); and Alastair J. Minnis, with V. J. Scattergood and J. J. Smith, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 36-72.

even poetic context. In two influential studies, Larry Scanlon and Elizabeth Allen each positioned the *Confessio* and the *Tales* in a long tradition of collections of exemplary narrative, and considered the difficulty which emerges between such narratives and the exemplary roles which might be expected of or imputed to them.<sup>3</sup> While provoking attention to the specific relationship between the *Confessio* and the *Tales*, these studies read the two poems against a very broad heritage of religious, political, and domestic *exempla* collections, and thereby lose a clear sense of their generic context. The recent work of Amanda Gerber complements Scanlon and Allen's approaches, and has helped to remedy this problem by acknowledging the persistent influence of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* as a story collection in the late Middle Ages; this approach leads to a more focused approach, running through the *Ovide moralisé* to the story collections of Chaucer and Gower, complemented by the mythographic collections of Boccaccio.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, even Gerber's work does not address the relationship between the three story collections and *dits amoureux* themselves. This is perhaps surprising; the status of the *Legend*, *Confessio*, and *Tales* as story collections emerges readily from *dits amoureux*. The retelling of Ovidian myths is a hallmark of the tradition, reaching back to *Roman de la rose*, and centred in Machaut's *Dit de la fontaine amoureuse* and, at some length, in the *exempla* which shape the trial of Machaut's *persona* in the *Jugement de Navarre*. The *Legend*, *Confessio*, and *Tales* are worth considering together as a sequence of story collections which emerged through the accentuation of an element which is already prominent in their francophone context.

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<sup>3</sup> See Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power: The Medieval Exemplum and the Chaucerian Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), and Elizabeth Allen, *False Fables and Exemplary Truth in Later Middle English Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

<sup>4</sup> See Amanda Gerber, *Medieval Ovid: Frame Narrative and Political Allegory* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).



Beyond the poetic features which they share, the *Confessio* and the *Tales* foreground a relationship between Chaucer and Gower. In the earliest version of the *Confessio*'s ending, Venus sends Gower away from her court with an invitation to be passed on to her poet Chaucer:

“That he upon his latere age,  
To sette an ende of alle his werk,  
As he which is myn owne clerk,  
Do make his testament of love,  
As thou hast do thi schrifte above,  
So that mi Court it mai recorde.”  
(CA, 8. 2952\*-57\*)

The reason for the removal of this address to Chaucer from the later versions of the *Confessio*'s ending is unclear; it is replaced with a fuller depiction of Gower's *persona*'s internal response to his departure from amorous love for a life of prayer. It should be noted that Gower's revisions to the text preserve thirty lines from the start of the Chaucer address to the next Latin verses, allowing for a consistent layout on the page. It cannot be said whether Gower removed the reference to Chaucer to create space for a more sophisticated response to movement from love to religious devotion, or replaced it with that material because he no longer considered it to be suitable.<sup>5</sup> It might indicate that from the point of revision onwards Gower was aware that Chaucer was working on the *Tales*, a work which does not fit Venus' commission for a 'testament of love'. Prior to this point, Gower evidently thought it possible that Chaucer might follow him in composing a work in the *dit amoureux* tradition: a poem about love, presented to Venus, and framed with an old man's perspective. It is well known that Chaucer in turn

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<sup>5</sup> See G. C. Macaulay, Introduction to the English works, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), II (1901), vii-clxxiv (pp. xxvii-xxviii), and the conclusions drawn in Peter Nicholson, 'Gower's Manuscript of the *Confessio amantis*', in *The Medieval Python: The Purposive and Provocative Work of Terry Jones*, ed. by R. F. Yeager and Toshiyuki Takamiya (London: Palgrave, 2012), pp. 75-86.

addresses Gower in the prologue to the Man of Law's Tale, a version of the Constance story which Gower tells in the *Confessio*. The Man of Law expresses concern that all the good stories have already been told by Chaucer:

“But nathelees, certeyn,  
I kan right now no thrifty tale seyn  
That Chaucer, thogh he kan but lewedly  
On metres and on rymyng craftily,  
Hath seyde hem in swich Englissh as he kan  
Of olde tyme, as knoweth many a man.”  
(*CT*, II. 45-50)

He is nonetheless pleased to note that Chaucer has avoided the obscene tales of Canace and Apollonius of Tyre:

“But certainly no word ne writeth he  
Of thilke wikke ensample of Canacee,  
That loved hir owene brother synfully –  
Of swiche cursed stories I sey fy! –  
Or ellis of Tyro Appollonius,  
How that he cursed kyng Anthiochus  
Birafted his doghter of hir maydenhede [...]”  
(*CT*, II. 77-83)

Gower is not named in the prologue, but it would have been obvious to an audience acquainted with Chaucer and Gower's work that the Man of Law's approval for these stories' exclusion from Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* and *Legend of Good Women* points towards their inclusion in the *Confessio amantis*, the only other collection of Ovidian stories available in English at the time. For all of the recognition that this passage has received, it is rarely noted that it is the only occasion in the *Canterbury Tales* on which Chaucer refers to a contemporary person apart from the intriguing identification of another Southwark personality, Harry Bailey.<sup>6</sup> This stands in contrast to the dedication to Queen Anne of Bohemia in the prologue to the *Legend of Good*

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<sup>6</sup> See Martha Carlin, 'The Host', in *Historians on Chaucer: The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Stephen H. Rigby with the assistance of Alastair J. Minnis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 460-80.

*Women* and the dedication to Gower and Strode at the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* – and coincides with the only occasion on which Chaucer’s own name is spoken. In her recent study of a corpus of ‘first-person allegory’ which includes the Deguileville’s *pèlerinage* trilogy, Chaucer’s dream visions, Hoccleve’s *Series*, and Lydgate’s *Fall of Princes*, Stephanie Kamath has drawn attention to the way in which poems descended from the *Roman de la rose* tend to pivot on a moment at which the poet’s *persona* is named by an external figure, a *topos* which seems to be in play here.<sup>7</sup> Kamath’s definition of allegory is capacious; to suggest that this moment stands in this tradition is not to imply that the *Canterbury Tales* is any more allegorical than Hoccleve’s *Series*. Indeed, allegory might be far beside the point. As addressed in Chapter One, Alastair Minnis has convincingly argued that the *Rose*’s invention often emerges from its conjunction of allegory with the concrete expression more common to satire, which produces an environment in which the status of ideas and figures becomes radically uncertain – a situation which Jonathan Morton identifies as posing a persistent challenge to philosophy by means of the poetic.<sup>8</sup> The passage has the unusual feature that Chaucer is named and not recognised to be present in the pilgrim company, but also that Chaucer’s identity as the poem’s author is set in a combative relationship with Gower.

Critics have noticed that this ostensible opposition actually articulates profound association between the two writers at this point. Elizabeth Allen has suggested that Chaucer’s humorous condemnation of Gower’s work reveals his awareness of a sophisticated mode of moral reading which Gower seeks in his audience, while Carolyn

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<sup>7</sup> See Stephanie A. Vierick Gibbs Kamath, *Authorship and First-Person Allegory in Late Medieval France and England*, Gallica, 26 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2012).

<sup>8</sup> See Alastair J. Minnis, *Magister amoris: The Roman de la rose and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), and Jonathan Morton, *The Romance of the Rose in its Philosophical Context: Art, Nature, and Ethics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

Dinshaw has read the episode as a foundational assertion of shared poetic responsibility, made over the prospect of the violation of women.<sup>9</sup> Any audience close to Chaucer is likely to have realised that this joke is made with high regard for Gower's *Confessio*, as Peter Nicholson illustrated how closely the following tale rests on Gower's Constance story in the *Confessio*, rather than simply being a parallel elaboration of the story from Nicholas Trevet's *Chronicle*.<sup>10</sup> At the point in the *Tales* at which his own authorship is brought into focus, Chaucer invites us to read the poem as the latest chapter in a contested revival of Ovidian poetic fables undertaken between him and Gower, in which the foremost previous instalments have been the *Legend of Good Women* and the *Confessio amantis*. This incident can be seen as the culmination of a long association between the two writers, the closest point in their works' mutual reference.

Given the absence of explicit information on the particulars of Chaucer and Gower's relationship as they composed these works, critical attention to the connection between the *Legend*, the *Confessio*, and the *Tales* has been marred by conjecture. In his edition of Gower's works, G. C. Macaulay suggested that Gower conceived of the *Confessio*'s story collection under the joint influence of a real encounter with Richard II and his reading of Chaucer's *Legend*; John Fisher developed this into the extravagant hypothesis that Gower's encounter with Richard II could have involved the presence of Chaucer and Anne of Bohemia, and led to a formal, royally mandated poetic contest

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<sup>9</sup> See Elizabeth Allen, 'Chaucer Answers Gower: Constance and the Trouble with Reading', *English Literary History*, 64. 3 (1997), 627-55; Carolyn Dinshaw, 'Rivalry, Rape, and Manhood: Gower and Chaucer', in *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, ed. by R. F. Yeager (Victoria: English Literary Studies, 1991), pp. 130-52; Carolyn Dinshaw, 'Quarrels, Rivals, and Rape: Gower and Chaucer', in *A Wyf ther Was: Essays in Honour of Paule Mertens-Fonck*, ed. by Juliette Dor (Liège: Université de Liège, Département d'anglais, 1992), pp. 112-22; and Carolyn Dinshaw, 'Rivalry, Rape and Manhood: Gower and Chaucer', in *Violence against Women in Medieval Texts*, ed. by Anna Roberts (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), pp. 137-60.

<sup>10</sup> See Peter Nicholson, 'The "Man of Law's Tale": What Chaucer Really Owed to Gower', *Chaucer Review*, 26. 2 (1991), 153-74.

which produced the *Legend* and the *Confessio*.<sup>11</sup> Joyce Coleman has since upheld this hypothesis and suggested that Clanvowe's *Book of Cupid* could have been part of the same process of royal commission, in an argument which takes at face value all hints of royal instigation for Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe's work.<sup>12</sup>

These accounts of royal commission are worth setting against the virtuosic account of Gower's political interest in articulating a claim to such commission undertaken by Frank Grady – a political interest which would have been similarly present for Chaucer.<sup>13</sup> The account which Gower provides does not provide convincing circumstances for a real meeting with Richard II:

I thenke and have it understonde,  
 As it bifel upon a tyde,  
 As thing which scholde tho betyde, -  
 Under the toun of newe Troye,  
 Which tok of Brut his ferste joye,  
 In Temse whan it was flowende  
 As I be bote cam rowende,  
 So as fortune hir tyme sette,  
 My liege lord par chaunce I mette;  
 And so befel, as I cam nyh,  
 Out of my bot, whan he me syh,  
 He bad me come into his barge.  
 And whan I was with him at large,  
 Amonges othre thinges seid  
 He hath this charge upon me leid,  
 And bad me doo my besynesse  
 That to his hihe worthinesse  
 Some newe thing I scholde boke,  
 That he himself it mihte loke  
 After the forme of my writyng.

(CA, Prologue. 34\*-53\*)

<sup>11</sup> See Macaulay, Introduction to English works, p. xxiv, and John Hurt Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 235-50.

<sup>12</sup> See Joyce Coleman, "'A Bok for King Richardes Sake": Royal Patronage, the *Confessio*, and the *Legend of Good Women*', in *On John Gower: Essays at the Millennium*, ed. by R. F. Yeager, Studies in Medieval Culture, 46 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), pp. 104-23.

<sup>13</sup> See Frank Grady, 'Gower's Boat, Richard's Barge, and the True Story of the *Confessio amantis*: Text and Gloss', *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 44. 1 (2002), 1-15.

A lot rests on ‘I thenke and have it understonde’; without a clear purpose to his *persona*’s actions, Gower position himself in the midst of a central element of English national legend – the Thames as the river on which Brutus founded New Troy – and then presents an encounter with the King which comes about ‘by fortune’. Their meeting is remarkably equitable. Richard bids Gower’s *persona* into his barge and lays a charge on him, but the charge is directed to the bettering of their acquaintance, in a situation in which it is not obvious that Gower’s reputation as a poet precedes him at all, and the fact that he had already dedicated the *Vox clamantis* to Richard’s education is entirely elided; Richard wishes to ‘loke | After the forme of my writyng.’ King Richard II is presented as a figure who can be readily encountered in England’s historical landscape, and who is ready to acquaint himself with any of his people and involve himself in their occupations. Martha Carlin has established that no documented associate of Gower held a position close to the royal court; indeed it is possible that Chaucer was the closest access he had to royal power, given that Chaucer’s sister-in-law, Katherine Swynford, was the privileged long-term mistress of John of Gaunt, the King’s uncle.<sup>14</sup> Chaucer’s own royal encounter with the God of Love in the Prologue to the *Legend* is not as hospitable as Gower’s:

I, knelyng by this flour, in good entente,  
 Abood to knowen what this peple mente,  
 As stille as any ston; til at the laste  
 This god of Love on me hys eyen caste,  
 And seyde, “Who kneleth there?” And I answerde  
 Unto his askyng, whan that I it herde,  
 And seyde, “Sir, it am I.”

(*LGW*, F Prologue. 308-14)

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<sup>14</sup> See Martha Carlin, ‘Gower’s Life’, in *Historians on John Gower*, ed. by Stephen H. Rigby and Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2019), <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2102306&site=ehost-live>> [accessed 20 April 2021], and Simon Walker, ‘Katherine [née Katherine Roelt; married name Katherine Swynford], duchess of Lancaster (1350?-1403)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (23rd September 2004) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/26858>> [accessed 21 April 2021].

Alceste intervenes against the God of Love's wrath to give Chaucer the penance to write his book, and 'yive it the quene, | On my byhalf, at Eltham or at Sheene'; neither she nor her consort is emphatically aligned with the person of Richard or Anne of Bohemia (*LGW*, F Prologue. 466-67). The God of Love does not behave at all like Richard in Gower's prologue, instead taking on an imperious majesty which has proved fertile ground for critics ready to associate him with Richard's contrastingly negative historical reputation. Behind the desire for two scenes of commissioning composed by two acquainted poets to reflect a single real event, these commissions are not particularly similar, and certainly do not suggest any response to a centralised royal impetus.

John Bowers has undertaken a process of conjecture similar to that of Fisher and Coleman to come to a different conclusion, namely that the *Legend* is a later work than often suspected, and that both it and the *Tales* were derived from the *Confessio*, with Chaucer's success obscuring Gower's vital place in literary history.<sup>15</sup> Fisher suggested that the *Tales* were a later production which emerged in response to the contest, with Chaucer developing an interest in Gower's estates satire only to abandon his strict morality in favour of enthusiasm for the (properly Chaucerian) impropriety of the Miller's Tale and the Reeve's Tale.<sup>16</sup> More perspicaciously than any of these accounts, R. W. Hanning surmised in the late 1990s that Chaucer developed the *Tales* under the immediate inspiration of the *Decameron*, but differentiated his project from Boccaccio's by lifting elements of Gower's work, in particular the attention to the social estates and the prospect that the tales could be read in accordance with the categories of formal morality. Hanning argues that Chaucer deferred the elements of morality which he took

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<sup>15</sup> See John M. Bowers, 'Rival Poets: Gower's *Confessio* and Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*', in *John Gower: Trilingual Poet*, ed. by Elisabeth M. Dutton, John Hines, and R. F. Yeager, *Westfield Medieval Studies*, 3 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 276-87.

<sup>16</sup> Fisher, pp. 251-302.

from Gower to the final figure of the Parson, a suspension of judgement which allowed the *Tales* to operate as a ‘postlapsarian’ space, in contrast to what Hanning reads as the highly moralised environment of Gower’s poetry.<sup>17</sup> This enables a ‘resultant uneven, unpredictable synthesis of ideology and personal response, which has made portraits such as that of the Prioress and, in a very different way, the Pardoner the object of so much critical debate’, and ‘effectively subverts the Gowerian prise de position as a prophetic voice analyzing society from an external, implicitly superior position’.<sup>18</sup> Strikingly, Gower is the poet of the *Mirour*, the *Vox*, and the *Confessio*’s prologue for much of Hanning’s argument, in a fashion which sets aside the troubling proximity of the *Confessio*’s main text to much of Chaucer’s work in the *Tales*. Finally, a highly eccentric account of the genesis of the *Canterbury Tales* by D. W. Lindeboom moves in the opposite direction, proposing that Chaucer’s Man of Law, Wife of Bath, Pardoner, and Parson were all derived from aspects of Amans’ confession to Genius, as part of a wider reading that takes the *Tales* as a set of exempla on the Seven Deadly Sins to echo the *Confessio*.<sup>19</sup>

In a sense, each of these interpretations stretches the evidence available too far in their search for a critical judgement on Chaucer’s poetics that could emerge from the way he and Gower responded to one another in this period; they admit an excitement that a dialogue is evident in these poems, but also a frustration that the precise nature of this dialogue is not stated. Fortunately, relatively good evidence survives for dating the *Legend* and the *Confessio*.<sup>20</sup> The *Legend* post-dates *Troilus and Criseyde*, given the God

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<sup>17</sup> See R. W. Hanning, “‘And Countrefete the Speche of Every Man | He Koude, whan he Sholde Telle a Tale’”: Toward a Lapsarian Poetics for the *Canterbury Tales*’, *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 21 (1999), 29-58.

<sup>18</sup> Hanning, p. 49.

<sup>19</sup> See B. W. Lindeboom, *Venus’ Owne Clerk: Chaucer’s Debt to the Confessio amantis*, Costerus, New Series 167 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> This is not the case for many of Chaucer’s shorter works despite a firm set of scholarly conventions – see the astute discussion in Kathryn L. Lynch, ‘Dating Chaucer’, *Chaucer Review*, 42. 1 (2007), 1-22.



of Love's charges against Chaucer's *persona* in the prologue. *Troilus* was itself composed between Chaucer's first visit to Italy in 1373 and Usk's reference to it in the *Testament of Love* in 1384-85; most scholars assume a date towards the end of this period, reflecting a critical desire to locate such an accomplished work later rather than earlier in Chaucer's career. Given that the dedication to Anne of Bohemia in the *Legend's* F Prologue is removed in the G Prologue, the poem's initial composition can probably be safely placed before Anne's death in 1392, leaving a date for the main work on the poem between about 1384 and 1392. The *Confessio* can be dated more accurately, as the account of the papal schism in its prologue carries the marginal note 'Anno domini Millesimo CCC<sup>o</sup> Nonagesimo' ('The year of Our Lord 1390') in copies of the text which contain the earlier dedication to Richard II (*CA*, Prologue. 331 *nota*). This date is absent from texts which bear the revised prologue which dedicates the poem to Henry, Earl of Derby. This is reasonable given that the revised prologue provides an alternative date of 1392: Gower is writing 'the yer sextenthe of kyng Richard' (*CA*, Prologue. 25).<sup>21</sup> The *Confessio* can therefore be dated to precisely the same period as the *Legend*, albeit towards the end of that slightly larger bracket. Bowers' proposition that the *Legend* imitated the *Confessio* is not impossible – it *could* be the case that the *Legend* was Chaucer's 'testament of love' – but this seems improbable given Chaucer's prominent allusion to the *Confessio* in the *Canterbury Tales*, a text which is not listed in the extended catalogue of Chaucer's work in either version of the *Legend's* prologue, where the G prologue adds the translation of Innocent III's *De miseria* to the list provided in the F prologue. Of course, it remains possible

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<sup>21</sup> See Macaulay, Introduction to English works, pp. xxi-xxii. For further details on Fairfax 3 and its text, see Peter Nicholson, 'Gower's Revisions in the *Confessio amantis*', *Chaucer Review*, 19. 2 (1984), 123-43; Peter Nicholson, 'Poet and Scribe in the Manuscripts of Gower's *Confessio amantis*', in *Manuscripts and Texts: Editorial Problems in Later Middle English Literature*, ed. by Derek Pearsall (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987), pp. 130-42; and Nicholson, 'Gower's Manuscript'.

that Gower included the invitation from Venus to Chaucer to refer to a work which was already in circulation, or which he knew existed. The date of the *Canterbury Tales*' composition is less clear. It was unfinished at Chaucer's death in 1400, but sections of it at least are likely to have seen some limited circulation before that point, given Chaucer's reference to the Wife of Bath in his envoy to Buckton.<sup>22</sup> Scholars have consistently observed that the activity of the Merchant in the General Prologue suggests a date prior to 1388, during the period in which the wool staple was based at Middelburg; but it is worth noting that the General Prologue promises a state of the *Tales* which has a return journey, two stories per pilgrim, and some differences of emphasis in the pilgrim company, features which suggest that it pertains to a relatively early stage in the project and would eventually have seen considerable revision.<sup>23</sup> This evidence suggests that Chaucer undertook most of his work on the *Tales* once he had completed most of the surviving work on the *Legend*, and that Gower composed the *Confessio* close to the point of this transition; it is possible that Gower had read the *Legend* but unlikely that Chaucer had completed much of the *Tales* by the point that the first recension of the *Confessio* was completed.

Beyond this basic sequence, little can be ascertained about the nature of Chaucer and Gower's dialogue in composing the three poems. However, this sequence valuably brings shape to Chaucer and Gower's reconsideration of the way in which they employed the narrative frame in the *Tales* and the *Confessio*, as it indicates that Chaucer incorporated material of direct religious significance into the narrative frame in the *Tales*, a strategy without precedent in the *Legend*, in the light of Gower having done so in the *Confessio*. It also suggests that Gower is likely to have first made this change to

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<sup>22</sup> See Geoffrey Chaucer, 'Lenvoy de Chaucer a Bukton', ed. by R. T. Lenaghan, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 655-56.

<sup>23</sup> See *CT*, explanatory note to I. 277, and the summative discussion in Marion Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), p. 369 n. 1.

the narrative frame in his departure from his earlier moral poetry to produce a work far closer to *dits amoureux* and to Chaucer's poetry, and possibly to the *Legend* in particular, than anything he had previously composed.

#### Moral Play in the *Confessio amantis*

One persistent line of criticism on the *Confessio* stresses its unity with Gower's other poems, as most influentially summarised in Fisher's emphasis on the 'single-mindedness' of Gower's literary production, a 'similarity in the method, structure, and content of his major pieces.'<sup>24</sup> According to this tradition, Gower consistently worked as a moralist, and his use of poetic fables and the dialogue between Amans and Genius in the *Confessio* is an attempt to be the new Arion he longs for at the close of the poem's prologue:

Bot wolde god that now were on  
An other such as Arion,  
Which hadde an harpe of such temprure,  
And therto of so good mesure  
He song, that he the bestes wilde  
Made of his note tame and milde.

(CA, Prologue. 1053-58)

In this tradition, the dialogue between Genius and Amans is this song, inviting its audience out of love or any other irrational state and towards the rational moral programme articulated in Gower's other devotional and satirical works. The beasts become the passions, tempered through the ensuing course of the *Confessio*, itself an instrumental employment of poetry to pursue the course of moral philosophy. The work

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<sup>24</sup> See Fisher, p. 135. Fisher's approach is influenced by the depiction of Gower as a moralist in George R. Coffman, 'John Gower in his Most Significant Role', in *Elizabethan Studies and Other Essays in Honor of George F. Reynolds*, ed. by E. J. West (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1945), pp. 52-61, and George R. Coffman, 'John Gower, Mentor for Royalty: Richard II', *PMLA*, 69. 4 (1954), 953-64.

of R. F. Yeager and Kurt Olsson has been influential in this respect. Yeager has argued that the acuity of Gower's style is sufficiently arresting to turn enjoyment of the *Confessio* into an address to moral questions, while Olsson has argued that the complexity of the *Confessio*'s textual surface is so disorienting as to invite a process of moral examination from the audience, emerging from the attempt to align the demands of Gower's prologue, Amans and Genius in dialogue, a series of Latin headings, and Latin prose commentary throughout.<sup>25</sup> In each of these cases, the poem's complexity, and its capacity to frustrate philosophy, is a moral tool, demanding responsible and persistent reading which has the capacity to inculcate substantial change in its audience. A similar approach is taken in the two most recent major monographs on Gower, by T. Matthew N. McCabe and Matthew Irvin.<sup>26</sup> These each attend to Gower's appeal to the affect, primarily in the *Confessio*, and consider this to be aimed at a programme of ethical improvement which echoes that in the *Mirour* and the *Vox*, with its culmination in Gower's retreat from Venus' love in favour of Christian charity; they envisage a process by which the audience is educated away from amorous love in their response to the complexity of the stories, even if Amans remains bound by his will until he is released by Venus. These approaches present Gower's narrative frame and fables as a mode of rhetoric; even though they admit a distinction between Gower's programmatic instruction in the *Mirour* and the *Vox*, and his work in the *Confessio*, this is a distinction of method rather than purpose. In contrast to these positions, Peter Nicholson cautions that there is no evidence in the *Confessio* that Gower considers the state of amorous

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<sup>25</sup> See R. F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion*, Publications of the John Gower Society, 2 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990), and Kurt Olsson, *John Gower and the Structures of Conversion: A Reading of the Confessio amantis*, Publications of the John Gower Society, 4 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> See T. Matthew N. McCabe, *Gower's Vulgar Tongue: Ovid, Lay Religion, and English Poetry in the Confessio amantis*, Publications of the John Gower Society, 6 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011), and Matthew W. Irvin, *The Poetic Voices of John Gower: Politics and Personae in the Confessio amantis*, Publications of the John Gower Society, 9 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2014).

love which coincides with the space within the narrative frame to be inherently unwise or immoral.<sup>27</sup> Instead, Nicholson argues that the poem's debt to Machaut, which is evident in, for example, Amans' bleary-eyed vision of love as he ventures out at the start of Book I, implies that it inherits a Machauldian conception of love which is reconcilable with reason and virtue if it can be successfully pursued and confined to youth, rather than simply articulating a conservative response to the difficulty and paradox of desire playfully presented in the *Roman de la rose* in the fashion suggested by Olsson and Yeager. For Nicholson, it is only the conclusion to the *Confessio*, at the end of Book VIII, when Amans cannot attain his desire and is found to be an old man, that determines his particular pursuit of love as sinful.

Both the moralising approaches of Yeager, Olsson, Irvin, and McCabe, and the opposing position represented by Nicholson's argument, have proved persistent in modern scholarship on the *Confessio* even though they are apparently contradictory. This persistence is due to the fact that both critical positions reasonably emerge from the way in which Gower develops the narrative frame in the poem. The employment of a narrative frame to create a space for poetic play, in which amorous love is explored in depth, was a great departure for Gower, who had previously presented this poetic tradition as morally negligent, and braced his moral poetry against the way in which it defers attention to moral consequence. In this departure he alters the narrative frame. He does not halt the demands of salvation history within the frame; instead he admits

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<sup>27</sup> See Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics in Gower's Confessio amantis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 9-30. Nicholson's position is complemented by those taken in Burrow, 'Portrayal of Amans', and J. A. Burrow, 'Sinning against Love in *Confessio amantis*', in *John Gower: Trilingual Poet*, ed. by Elisabeth M. Dutton, John Hines, and R. F. Yeager, *Westfield Medieval Studies*, 3 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2010), pp. 217-29, as well as in the persistently influential Derek Pearsall, 'Gower's Narrative Art', *PMLA*, 81. 7 (1966), 475-84.

material into the space for play which demands an awareness of full Christian morality.

Genius outlines two duties he will be bound by in the instruction he offers Amans:

“Thi schrifte to oppose and hiere,  
 My Sone, I am assigned hiere  
 Be Venus the godesse above,  
 Whos Prest I am touchende of love.  
 Bot natheles for certein skile  
 I mot algat and nedes wile  
 Noght only make my spekynges  
 Of love, bot of othre thinges,  
 That touchen to the cause of vice.  
 For that belongeth to thoffice  
 Of Prest, whos ordre that I bere.”

(CA, 1. 232-42)

Genius makes this division between his instruction *qua* Venus’ servant and his instruction *qua* priest throughout the poem: he treats his guidance on the Seven Deadly Sins and their species according to love at certain times and according to Christian morality at others, explicitly outlining which is foremost on numerous occasions. This has the result of inviting the audience to read the poem with an eye both to the parodic morality set out in the play inherited from traditions of amorous poetry and to real morality informed by salvation history, given that they can overlap and become implicated in one another. For instance, in Book I, Genius tells Amans about the vice of hypocrisy, a species of Pride, in relation to the conduct of those in religious (CA, 1. 594-621), secular ecclesiastical (CA, 1. 622-45), and worldly life (CA, 1. 643-72), and then in relation to the conduct of lovers (CA, 1. 672-707). Genius proceeds to tell an *exemplum* which he claims will urge Amans not to commit the crime of hypocrisy as a lover:

“To love is every herte fre,  
 Bot in deceipte if that thou feignest  
 And therupon thi lust atteignest,  
 That thow hast wonne with thi wyl,  
 Thogh it thee like for a whyle,  
 Thou schalt it afterward repente.”

(CA, 1. 752-56)

The story of Mundus and Paulina which follows (CA, 1. 761-1059) tells of the exercise of this hypocrisy in Duke Mundus' seduction of Paulina, but this seduction takes place through the design of the two priests of Isis who convince Paulina that Mundus is a god so that she will sleep with him in the temple. At the end of the story the Emperor and his council find the priests particularly guilty because they are supposed to guide the people in righteousness, and execute them, but mitigate the sentence on Mundus to exile, 'For Love put reson aweie | And can nocht se the righte weie' (CA, 1. 1051-52). The story introduced as an example against hypocrisy in love does stand as such, but it even more vehemently condemns the hypocrisy of the priesthood which was initially introduced as a point of wider morality. Amorous morality and proper morality are mutually implicated; it is consistently difficult to determine how far one might stand and not the other, and this task is almost entirely left to the poem's audience.

The only conclusion the poem offers to this problem is Amans' ultimate retreat from love at Genius' instigation, seeing that his lady will never accept him:

"Take love where it mai nocht faile:  
 For as of this which thou art inne,  
 Be that thou seist it is a Sinne,  
 And Sinne mai no pris deserve,  
 Withoute pris and who schal serve,  
 I not what profit myhte availe."  
 (CA, 8. 2085-91)

This can be read either as the culmination of a programme of instruction or as a closure of the space for play, according to the reader's judgement. Readers who take the final retreat from love as a conclusion to an instructive programme have to account for the significant amount of attention Genius pays to the pursuit of amorous love before the end of the poem, hence the relatively common position that Genius is a morally compromised instructor which the audience are invited to outwit, developing their ethical *habitus* – as in Olsson's attention to irreconcilable array of voices in the poem,

Yeager's claim that the *Confessio* maintains a distinction between the nuptial and the carnal Venus in its tacit moral programme, or Elizabeth Allen's suggestion that Genius' exemplary tales are so obliquely told as invite further moral probing from the poem's audience.<sup>28</sup> It is worth noting that the most recent studies to take an ethical approach, namely the monographs of McCabe and Irvin, have stressed the moral insufficiency of Amans to learn from Genius' guidance, with him falling back on the necessary retreat from love out of the unavailability of sufficient virtue to him earlier in the poem, rather than suggesting that Genius' guidance is itself morally suspect. They have been able to do this due to their wider argument that the poetic exploration of love in the dialogue between Genius and Amans is a specialised mode of moral instruction – a pious treatise for a lay audience in McCabe's case, and a treatise attuned to the Aristotelian conditions of ethical argument in Irvin's.<sup>29</sup>

Alastair Minnis has argued convincingly that the *Confessio* pertains to ethics through its play and that it undertakes a mode of ethical instruction understood to be natural to poetics, one which commentary traditions positioned as a mode of ethical reading emergent in an encounter with material which was varied and not consistently serious.<sup>30</sup> An example of the *Confessio* at its most playful in this sense could be the transition between two *exempla* against stealth in love, a species of Covetousness. Genius moves from the story of Apollo's affair with Leucothoe, for which her father buried her alive (CA, 5. 6712-6806), to the tale of Faunus attempting to steal Hercules' lover Eole, and accidentally getting into bed with him instead, because the couple had spent the evening cross-dressing (CA, 5. 6807-6941). Minnis' argument is particularly

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<sup>28</sup> See Olsson, *Structures of Conversion*; Yeager, *Gower's Poetic*; Allen, *False Fables*.

<sup>29</sup> See McCabe, *Vulgar Tongue*, in particular pp. 192-226, and Irvin, *Poetic Voices*, pp. 277-88.

<sup>30</sup> See Minnis, "Moral Gower" and Medieval Literary Theory', in *Gower's Confessio amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. by Alastair J. Minnis (Cambridge: Brewer, 1983), pp. 50-78.



valuable because it allows for a breadth of interpretation, and for a moral reading of, the poem which cannot remain conclusive – a feature which can be seen in the critical tradition responding to the *Confessio*, which is able to produce informed responses like both those of Olsson and Nicholson, from two of the most accomplished readers of the poem. Minnis has written on the mode of play engaged by Chaucer in the *Legend* and by Gower in *Confessio* on separate occasions, making recourse to slightly different contexts of literary play in each case. He stresses that the *Legend*'s play is strictly parodic, resting on the love martyrology's parallel to and distance from spiritual martyrologies. Chaucer's poem does not make contact with the register of devotion, and cannot effectively contradict it because it exists as an hypothetical counterpart, dependent on the moral consequence of its serious parallel.<sup>31</sup> In other words, the narrative frame in the *Legend* is a space where the usual rules of piety are arrested, as is common in francophone love poetry – as, for instance, can be found in lover's pilgrimage at the end of the *Roman de la rose* or in the reverence Froissart pays to the image of his lady in the *Joli buisson*. This is not to say that it is impossible for the *Legend* to make contact with theological matters; Sheila Delany, for example, has ably situated the implications of the poem's treatment of women in a theological context.<sup>32</sup> However, these implications can only be drawn out by an attentive audience, and they are always contingent, open to dismissal on the grounds that they do not follow the poem on the terms which it is presented. In contrast to this, Minnis sets the *Confessio*'s design as a book 'Somewhat of lust, somewhat of lore' in the context of the medieval schoolroom truism that play is a necessary part of education (*CA*, Prologue. 19).<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See Alastair J. Minnis, with V. J. Scattergood and J. J. Smith, *Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Shorter Poems* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 330-454; Minnis' position on the *Legend* shares ground with Florence Percival, *Chaucer's Legendary Good Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

<sup>32</sup> See Sheila Delany, *The Naked Text: Chaucer's Legend of Good Women* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994).

<sup>33</sup> See Minnis, "Moral Gower" and Theory'.

This is not quite the same thing as saying that Gower's play in the *Confessio* is a means of educating his audience, as to render it instrumental would be to prevent it from being play; the conjunction of Venus' service and priesthood in Genius would not have been alien to an audience aware of Ovid's instruction in *licitus amor*, but be understood as both ethical and playful, a condition which was normal in the poetic remit. As Minnis has argued elsewhere, the prologue to the *Confessio* both summarises Gower's estates satire, as presented more expansively in the *Mirour* and the *Vox*, and works as an academic extrinsic prologue, locating the poem's subject of the experience of being in love, an experience which has often distorted wisdom, in the wider context of the pursuit of wisdom, and its necessity in the present world.<sup>34</sup> This form of poetic play depends on continuity between, rather than a separation of, the love fiction and its spiritual counterpart; the game does not rest in working out what the amorous version of an ecclesiastical model might look like, but in creating a space in which amorous love and Christian morality do not make contradictory demands and are amenable to the same modes of analysis. The existence of this space requires it to be framed; it needs to be shown to differ from the circumstances in which the full demands of morality stand. This does not mean that the playful space of ethics and amorous matter set together is to be condemned. Stephanie Batkie has recently made a similar argument that the *Confessio* is shaped by the space between amorous desire and a self which is articulated in relation to ecclesiastical discipline through confession, but this position requires further nuance. Rather than this tension producing the artistic space of the poem, this space offers a release from the tension which could not exist outside the playfulness of poetry.<sup>35</sup> It is possible for an audience to be unconvinced by this fictionalising space and

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<sup>34</sup> See Alastair J. Minnis, 'John Gower, *Sapiens* in Ethics and Politics', *Medium Ævum*, 49. 2 (1980), 207-29.

<sup>35</sup> See Stephanie Batkie, 'Loving Confession in the *Confessio amantis*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 39 (2017), 99-128.

to seek out its flaws, returning to the stable rationalism which lies outside it and outside the experience of being in love – as Yeager and Olsson do in their studies – but this is not the only way in which an audience might respond to the fiction, and the poem facilitates an audience spending considerable amounts of time in this space of play. It is a full mode of poetry, with its own narrative frame.

Accepting Minnis' argument, in contrast to Chaucer's parodic martyrology in the *Legend*, the amorous space of the *Confessio* can include the entire range of narrative material, from Ovidian fables to recent ecclesiastical history. One passage of extreme contrast can help illuminate the specific mode of play in which Gower demands such a complex mode of moral response from its audience. At the end of Book II of the *Confessio*, Gower incorporates a short story which he previously included in the satires on the clergy in the both the *Mirour* and the *Vox*. In all three poems he recounts how a voice announced the coming decline of the Church when Constantine gave temporal power to the papacy:

Je truis primer qant Costentin  
 Donnoit du Rome au pape en fin  
 Possessioun de la terrestre,  
 Ly Rois du gloire celestin  
 Amont en l'air de son divin  
 Par une voix q'estoit celestre  
 Faisoit crier, si dist *que* l'estre  
 Du sainte eglise ove tout le prestre  
 Ne serront mais si bon cristin,  
 Comme ainz estoient leur ancestre,  
 Pour le venim qui devoit crestre  
 De ce q'ils ont le bien terrin.

First, I find that when Constantine gave possession of the terrestrial things of Rome entirely to the Pope, the heavenly King of Glory had it cried out high in the air in a holy sound, through a voice which was celestial, that the state of Holy Church, with all the priests, will no longer be as good Christians as their ancestors were before them, on account of the venom which was due to grow from the fact that they had these earthly goods.

(*MO*, ll. 18,637-48)

Hec vox angelica, que nuper in ethere Romam  
 Terruit, en nostro iam patet orbe nouo.  
 Tempore Siluestri, dum Constantinus eidem  
 Contulit ecclesie terrea dona sue,  
 “Virus in ecclesia seritur nunc,” angelus inquit,  
 “Terrea dum mundi fit domus ipsa dei.”

This angelic voice, which formerly terrified Rome from the sky, now comes forth in our new sphere. In the time of Silvester, then when Constantine devoted his earthly goods to the Church, an angel said:

“A poison is now sown in the Church, since things of earth make that which was the house of God the house of the world.”  
 (VC, 3. 283-88)

“But how so that his will was good  
 Toward the Pope and his Franchis,  
 Yit hath it proved other wise,  
 To se the worching of the dede:  
 For in Cronique this I rede;  
 Anon as he hath mad the yifte.  
 A vois was herd on hih the lifte,  
 Of which al Rome was adrad,  
 And seith: “To day is venym schad  
 In holi cherche of temporal,  
 Which medleth with the spirital.”  
 (CA, 2. 3482-92)

The first two of these passages occur in the satire on the clergy, which is one episode in a full estates satire, in which the details provided by the *Mirour* and the *Vox* are very similar. Much of this material is repeated for the third time in the satire on the clergy in the prologue to the *Confessio*, again part of a (much abbreviated) satire on all the estates. However, this story is reserved in the *Confessio* for a place within the narrative frame, in Amans’ confession, where it forms a coda to Genius’ *exemplum* in favour of charity as a remedy to Envy. The *exemplum* itself is the story behind the donation of Constantine (CA, 2. 3187-3496), in which Constantine is afflicted with leprosy and told that he can be healed by bathing in the blood of male children; when charity moves Constantine not to sacrifice children to his health, St Peter and St Paul appear to him in

a dream and invite him to find the Pope, St Silvester, and convert to Christianity. The story closes with mention of spiritual poison to show how Constantine's donation of temporal goods has come to harm the Church.

This report of the voice from heaven is no less serious in itself within the narrative frame of the *Confessio*. Likewise, the story which it follows was widely taken to be historical, and modern critics have assumed a serious instructive impulse behind Gower's telling of it. Matthew McCabe has read this passage as a piece of vernacular theology invested in kenosis as a form of self-emptying pity which breaks down divisions between clergy and laity. In his reading, the *Confessio* is a more effective devotional tool in its detailing of the story through art than the account provided in the *Mirour* or the *Vox*.<sup>36</sup> A similar reading of the story as an ecclesiological proposition can be found in Larry Scanlon's account of a current of secular appropriation underpinning Gower's approach to ecclesiastical morality: that Gower stands as part of a capitalist lay movement employing ecclesiastical categories to castigate the Church, and parasitic on ecclesiastical authority through the vehicle of a classicising poetry.<sup>37</sup> However, these accounts obscure some of the complexity of what happens in the *Confessio*'s narrative frame. Imagining Amans' confession – 'As for to speke in loves cas' – we are to assume that the story is an invitation for him to accept the success of other lovers with compassion, as he begins Book II by confessing that he is unable to do so (*CA*, 2. 13 and 2. 16-78). This suggests a degree of continuity between the less significant charity Amans could show in his love affair and the more significant charity shown by Constantine in refusing to slaughter children; that virtuous conduct in the fictionalised space of love is ennobled by its contiguity with one of the most important acts of virtuous conduct in salvation history. This proposition can even be nuanced by the coda

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<sup>36</sup> See McCabe, *Vulgar Tongue*, pp. 122-40.

<sup>37</sup> See Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, pp. 245-97.

on the corrupting influence of Constantine's donation, which suggests that the virtuous pursuit of charity might be an Aristotelian mean between Envy and Constantine's irresponsible trust; this would anticipate the use of such an Aristotelian model of virtue when addressing princely conduct in Book VII of the *Confessio*.

However, this continuity rests on silence. Amans asks for an *exemplum* in favour of virtue against the vice of Envy and receives this account of ecclesiastical government at a turning-point in salvation history rather than in relation to anything particularly pertinent to the conduct of a love affair. Immediately prior to the story of Constantine, Genius provides a series of *exempla* against the fifth species of Envy, supplantation – the desire to take the place and rights of another. This is accompanied by four accounts of 'supplant of love': Agamemnon taking Briseis from Achilles (*CA*, 2. 2451-55), Diomedes taking Cressida from Troilus (*CA*, 2. 2456-58), an irregular version of the story of Alcmene where Amphitruon takes her from Geta (*CA*, 2. 2459-95), and the extended fable of a Roman Emperor's son who was due to marry the daughter of a Sultan he served, but was supplanted by his trusted knight (*CA*, 2. 2501-2781). These are followed by an account which pertains to the Church rather than to lovers:

“And therupon if I schal sette  
 Ensample, in holy cherche I finde  
 How that Supplant is noght behinde;  
 God wot if that it now be so;  
 For in Cronique of time ago  
 I finde a tale concordable  
 Of Supplant, which that is no fable,  
 In the manere as I schal telle,  
 So as whilom the thinges felle.”

(*CA*, 2. 2794-2802)

An account of Pope Boniface VIII's deceit to provoke the abdication of Celestine V and take the Holy See follows, in which he is rewarded for his supplanting by starving to death in the King of France's prison after his attempt to assert temporal power over him

(CA, 2. 2803-3040). In these circumstances, the tale of Constantine, which is the final *exemplum* in favour of the virtue of Charity in response to the Book on Envy, takes up this thread whilst leaving the topic of supplanting in love unresolved. The connection between virtuous conduct in love and virtuous conduct in salvation history has to be specified by the audience, and they can refuse to do this, producing those critical readings which take the entire *Confessio* as an artful treatise on the futility of amorous love in the light of salvation history. To judge amorous love useless, however, is still to take up the work Gower leaves for the audience in the *Confessio*, and to engage with a poetic mode which is playful in the demands it makes – or avoids making – regarding moral consequence. The space for play in *dits amoureux* is created by holding the moral consequence demanded by Christianity at bay, such as when Machaut's *persona* meets divine judgement in the form of the plague at the start of the *Jugement de Navarre* only to see it postponed, leaving a space in which he can encounter Bonneüirté on a sunny morning. In the *Confessio*, the poem's play is created around the demands of divine judgement, allowing these demands to arise in a circumstance where they can be addressed without being immediately urgent, and under contingent conditions.

#### Satire and Play in the *Canterbury Tales*

When Chaucer composed the *Canterbury Tales* he was not in dialogue with the same 'moral Gower' to whom he had dedicated *Troilus*. Gower's work with morality in the *Confessio* had different parameters, and these are likely to have been available to Chaucer during the greater part of his work on the *Tales*. We do not know which stage in the *Tales*' composition Chaucer had reached when he first read the *Confessio*. As mentioned above, the Merchant's activity at Middelburg indicates that Chaucer may have been working on the General Prologue shortly before 1388, slightly prior to the

date of 1390 given in the first-recension prologue to the *Confessio*; this obviously stands in contrast to the absence of any mention of the *Tales* in either version of the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women* and the incomplete state in which it remains. It is likely that Chaucer worked on the *Tales* over a considerable period of time, but the *Confessio* was certainly complete during the greater part of this work. In his new attention to the estates of contemporary society in the *Tales* we should not imagine Chaucer simply loosening the ties of Gower's estates satire through the genial employment of *fabliaux* and postponement of casuistry to the Parson's Tale, as Fisher and Hanning suggested. Instead, he appears to have worked in step with Gower to produce a narrative frame which does not halt moral consequence, but leaves its full resolution to the audience. Indeed, it is worth considering the possibility the conjunction of estates satire material with the closing penitential schematics of the Parson's Tale was a direct response to the material that had shaped Gower's earlier moral poetry in the *Mirour* and the *Vox*, and remained the lodestone of moral consequence in the *Confessio*'s prologue and ending.

The question of where moral judgement stands in the *Canterbury Tales* has naturally focussed on the Parson's Tale, which asserts an orthodox formal moral schema and closes the poem's narrative frame entirely. The efficacy of this closure and its mode of operation have, of course, been the subject of extensive critical debate; this is more fully addressed in Chapter Five, but broadly breaks down into tendency which Siegfried Wenzel has labelled teleological and perspectivist – those which take the Parson's Tale as the summation and conclusion of the other tales, and those which take it to be an addition to the collection which stands in the equivalent position to the others, without the ability to offer any resolution.<sup>38</sup> However, much as for the *Confessio*, a further

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<sup>38</sup> See Siegfried Wenzel, 'The Parson's Tale in Current Literary Studies', in *Closure in the Canterbury Tales: The Role of the Parson's Tale*, ed. by David Raybin and Linda Tarte Holley, *Studies in Medieval Culture*, 41 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), pp. 1-10; see also the earlier and more expansive overview of critical positions in David Lawton, 'Chaucer's Two Ways: The Pilgrimage Frame of the



tradition of criticism recognises serious issues of morality as in play throughout the *Tales*, regardless of the way in which Parson's Tale should be received. This remains most controversially represented by the exegetical work of D. W. Robertson, but is implicit in celebrated non-Robertsonian studies. The Marxist account of the *exemplum* and authority in Chaucerian poetics influentially provided by Larry Scanlon, for instance, recognises an earnest impetus towards appropriating ecclesiastical authority which runs through the play of the *Tales*, with the Parson's Tale the summation of a longer process, whilst readings from V. A. Kolve and Lee Patterson take the Man of Law's Tale as a reassertion of spiritual propriety against the Miller's Tale, the Reeve's Tale, and the Cook's Tale.<sup>39</sup> Even Nicholas Watson's moderate search for a functioning lay piety, available to the *mediocriter boni*, in the world of the *Tales*, finds it articulated as a viable proposition before the Parson's Tale, in the path to Christian charity through a reasoned pursuit of self-interest outlined in the Tale of Melibee.<sup>40</sup> This attention to the possibility of a moral reading sensibly responds to a set of conditions which Chaucer establishes in the General Prologue, when he outlines his pilgrims:

But, nathelees, whil I have tyme and space,  
 Er that I ferther in this tale pace,  
 Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun  
 To telle yow al the condicioun  
 Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,  
 And whiche they weren, and of what degree,  
 And eek in what array that they were inne.

(CT, I. 35-41)

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*Canterbury Tales*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 9 (1987), 3-40, which builds on Lee Patterson, 'The Parson's Tale and the Quitting of the *Canterbury Tales*', *Traditio*, 34 (1978), 331-80.

<sup>39</sup> See Larry Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*; V. A. Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative: The First Five Canterbury Tales* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1984); and Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

<sup>40</sup> See Nicholas Watson, 'Chaucer's Public Christianity', *Religion and Literature*, 37. 2 (2005), 99-114, supported by Nicholas Watson, 'Langland and Chaucer', in *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology*, ed. by Andrew Hass, David Jasper, and Elisabeth Jay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 363-81.

These characteristics reach back to the *condicioun* – the nature of this condition is underdetermined, particularly given that it is additional to the pilgrims’ distinction from one another (‘whiche they weren’), their social standing (‘of what degree’), and the articulation of themselves through dress (‘in what array that they were inne’). These circumstances echo the variables which determine the severity of sin as addressed in confession. Played out across a company representative of different social estates, the arrangement resembles the conjunction of satire and self-examination which creates a space for morally responsible poetry in Gower’s *Mirour* and *Vox*. In providing one representative of each estate, Chaucer facilitates a reading which would attend to the spiritual condition of that single figure. Of course, Chaucer famously refrains from judgement on the pilgrims he outlines in the General Prologue; the commentary on ‘Chaucerian irony’ is well-known to be venerable and extensive.<sup>41</sup> However, by setting his fiction in this casuistic and satirical bracket Chaucer has already invoked the prospect of judgement, long before the formal theology of the Parson’s Tale; this supports David Lawton’s argument that fabulation is underpinned by suspicion from the General Prologue onwards, preparing the ground for the radical departure made in the Parson’s Tale.<sup>42</sup> Judgement is deferred to the audience, as it is in the Gower’s *Confessio*, and it is for them to determine how far any pilgrim fulfils or falls short of the demands of their position in society, and to what degree this might have moral consequence. This audience response is anticipated by Chaucer’s lack of judgement in the General Prologue, and the bewildered characterisation of his *persona*, who inhabits

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<sup>41</sup> A useful introduction to the discussion can be found in David Lawton, ‘Donaldson and Irony’, *Chaucer Review*, 41. 3 (2007), 231-39, which looks back to the foundational E. Talbot Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer* (London: Athlone Press, 1970). The summary of contemporary approaches to irony which would have been familiar to Chaucer in Beryl Rowland, ‘Seven Kinds of Irony’, in Earle Birney, *Essays on Chaucerian Irony*, ed. by Beryl Rowland (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), pp. xv-xxx, provides a valuable counterpart to the critical commentary.

<sup>42</sup> See Lawton, ‘Chaucer’s Two Ways’.

a clearly distorted perspective reminiscent of those given to the authorial *personae* in *dits amoureux*, even though he is not presented as a lover; his distance from the other pilgrims resembles the cautious observation of Machaut's *persona* in the *Jugement de Behaigne*, while his lack of awareness of the conduct of individuals around him resembles the position of Froissart's *persona* in his enchanted return to his youth in the *Joli buisson*. Chaucer's withdrawal from judgement in the arrangement of his pilgrims and his own *persona* figure proceeds to underpin any response the audience might make to each of the tales as a performance by the relevant teller. They would be aware of judgement as a prospect facing each of the pilgrims, but uncertain as to the point at which, and the degree to which, that judgement could become a reasonable response to the poem. Hanning's suggestion that the deferral of formal casuistry to the Parson's Tale creates a post-lapsarian space in the tales themselves is only really fair in so far as an audience would have to be aware of how lapsarian that space is; if this is an innovation on Chaucer's part, the audience would have an eye to the judgement which had, unusually, not been passed. Chaucer's withholding of judgement does not obviate the potential for judgement to be passed on any of the pilgrims at almost any point, even if the audience chooses not to pursue it as a response to the poem.

As in the space within the narrative frame of the *Confessio*, this unfulfilled prospect of judgement provokes a range of responses from different readers. This can be seen clearly in the case of the Second Nun's Tale, which appears to preserve the text Chaucer previously circulated as his life of St Cecilia. The Second Nun is provided with no definition as a pilgrim – her 'condicioun' is obscure beyond the fact of her office. Even the words of her prologue resist application to her if we take the refusal to enter through the 'gate of Idleness' as a reference to the poetic horizons of the figure of Oiseuse in the *Roman de la rose*; Chapter Three has considered the likelihood that this prologue invites a reading in dialogue with Chaucer's work as a poet more readily than

it refers to the Nun's vocation. Scholarship on the tale has therefore had to consistently wrestle with the problem of the Nun's orthodoxy; we are obliged to read the tale as aligned only with duty to a Christian profession and formal vocation when the frame of the *Canterbury Tales* elsewhere invites suspicion as to how the demands raised by such a position are being fulfilled. This has encouraged critics to strain to find a way of differentiating the condition of the Second Nun from her occupation. Karen Arthur heroically attempted to find an articulation of the Nun's own vocational life in relation to St Cecilia's, largely ignoring the evidence that Chaucer had previously circulated the text without the *persona*, while Thomas Kennedy cunningly worked around this situation by suggesting that we take the Nun to be characterised by the act of translation which produces the life of St Cecilia – without addressing the consequences of absorbing the composition history of other tales into the activity of the *persona* who delivers them.<sup>43</sup> More recently, Jennifer Sisk has given an account of the Second Nun's Tale which provides a circular characterisation: 'The Nun [...] offers an idealized portrait of the early church in a hagiographic legend set in the distant past. She offers no commentary on the reformist discourse to which her tale seems to allude but merely engages its ideal by presenting a version of it in her legend of Saint Cecilia.'<sup>44</sup> The allusion to reformist discourse emerges only from the fact that the Nun's Tale is set at the time of the primitive Church, the same condition which prevents any commentary on reformist discourse. Similarly, the recent work of Mary Beth Long takes the likely Benedictine affiliation of the Nun as a basis for a hypothesis as to how her voicing of

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<sup>43</sup> See Karen Arthur, 'Equivocal Subjectivity in Chaucer's Second Nun's Prologue and Tale', *Chaucer Review*, 32. 3 (1998), 217-31, and Thomas C. Kennedy, 'The Translator's Voice in the Second Nun's *Invocacio*: Gender, Influence, and Textuality', *Medievalia et humanistica*, New Series 22 (1995), 95-110.

<sup>44</sup> Jennifer L. Sisk, 'Religion, Alchemy, and Nostalgic Idealism in Fragment VIII of the *Canterbury Tales*', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 32 (2010), 151-77.

the tale might stand in its context.<sup>45</sup> The lack of detail for the Second Nun's condition is frustrating, because it short-circuits the moral play available: we know that the Nun could be judged according to her standing, but nothing in her characterisation or her tale permits this to occur in a way available for other pilgrims. This can be set in contrast to the Prioress, who we are clearly invited to consider as violating the terms of her monastic vocation in the General Prologue, even if the details of her deviance are hard to precisely determine.<sup>46</sup>

The altercation between the Friar and the Summoner creates an opposite but similar problem. These two pilgrims are sufficiently spiritually unfit for their position to complete the image set out in the General Prologue into a full programme of satire which leaves little space for further audience interpretation. The Friar and the Summoner each see the other as a corrupt facilitator of sin, offering a full condemnation of one another both in their own perspective and the hypocrisy which this evinces. They even reach beyond the purview of satire on the contemporary state of the world, as outlined in Chapter Two, to look to the last judgement, where they set a fictional version of their opposite in hell – the Friar with his tale of a summoner who gleefully collects rents with a devil and manages to collect himself on the devil's behalf, and the Summoner with the prologue to his tale, in which a friar is blessed with a vision of hell and shown where all the friars reside in the devil's arse. The Friar closes his tale with an invitation to his audience to pray for grace that they be led out of temptation, but his

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<sup>45</sup> See Mary Beth Long, "O Sweete and Wel Biloved Spouse Deere": A Pastoral Reading of Cecilia's Post-Nuptial Persuasion in the Second Nun's Tale', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 39 (2017), 159-90.

<sup>46</sup> For the difficulty determining the precise charges against the Prioress in the General Prologue, see Katherine J. Lewis, 'The Prioress and the Second Nun', in *Historians on Chaucer: The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Stephen H. Rigby with the assistance of Alastair J. Minnis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 94-113; for a close study of some of these problems regarding the literal sense of the text, see Thomas J. Farrell, 'The Prioress's Fair Forehead', *Chaucer Review*, 42. 2 (2007), 211-21.

attention is rooted in the fact that sin has been associated with the activity of summoners. He conspicuously lacks the turn Gower carefully makes to implicate his own sinful position in society:

Disposeth ay youre hertes to withstonde  
 The feend, that yow wolde make thral and bonde.  
 He may nat tempte yow over youre myght,  
 For Crist wol be youre champion and knyght.  
 And prayeth that thise somonours hem repente  
 Of hir mysdedes, er that the feend hem hente!  
 (CT, III. 1660-64)

From advocating wariness to all temptation, the Friar turns to his tale being a threat to all summoners – that in the present state of the world they are all likely to be on their way to the fate that met his summoner, namely to being dragged to hell. This is matched by the Summoner’s briefer: ‘God save yow alle, save this cursed Frere!’ (CT, III. 1706), which either seeks to exempt the Friar from this prayer for salvation, or pray for him more insistently on the grounds that he is need of particular grace to attain salvation from his present state. The Friar and Summoner are each bent on condemnation in a distorted form of satire, with perspectives that cancel each other out, in a fashion which echoes Benjamin Saltzmann’s recent argument that these two tales circle around the prospect of names being removed from lists between earthly and supernatural bureaucracy.<sup>47</sup>

The Friar’s Tale is concise and witty; it is not a tale which depends on cultural contexts likely to appear foreign to a modern audience, like the Parson’s Tale, the Tale of Melibee, the Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale, or the Second Nun’s Tale. In the light of this it has received surprisingly inconsistent critical attention. Studies tend to concentrate on the glossing of interpretative cruxes and historical details in the tale, along with

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<sup>47</sup> See Benjamin A. Saltzmann, ‘The Friar, the Summoner, and their Techniques of Erasure’, *Chaucer Review*, 52. 4 (2017), 363-95.

explorations of its sources and analogues.<sup>48</sup> In the 1970s, R. T. Lenaghan observed that readings of the Friar's Tale were remarkably consistent, a consensus which V. A. Kolve challenged in the 1980s with a reading which distinctly departed from the consideration of the text's cruxes and contexts, to set the carter, one of the *mediocriter boni* – neither damned nor saved yet – at the heart of an interpretation of the tale instead of the damned summoner.<sup>49</sup> Kolve's attempt to break the consensus strikingly depended on shifting focus from the inevitability of the wicked summoner's inadvertent but consensual damnation; there is a sense that readings of the tale struggle find something new to say about a story which plays out its overt premise so neatly. The Friar's depiction of the summoner taken to hell in his tale and the Summoner's depiction of the friars damned in the devil's arse in his prologue present the final state of divine retribution for the sins of a social group. However, the neatness of the tale is intriguingly split between its moral tidiness and its wit. The states of damnation presented for friars and summoners stand on the edge between religious *exemplum* and *fabliau*. The summoner in the Friar's Tale is damned because he is a sinner, but the story turns on a humorous twist of logic pertaining to language which reflects the summoner's spiritual state – his insistence that the devil take the carter's horse, cart, and hay, which the carter has cursed, is not carried out because the carter did not speak in earnest, where the summoner's attempt to seize the old woman's property meets with her cursing him entirely in earnest. As John Finlayson has convincingly argued, the Friar's Tale is as immediately funny as it is

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<sup>48</sup> Recent work of this kind includes V. J. Scattergood, "Goodfellas, Sir John Clanvowe and Chaucer's Friar's Tale: "Occasions of Sin"", in *Chaucer's Poetry: Words, Authority, and Ethics*, ed. by Clíodhna Carney and Frances McCormack, *Dublin Studies in Medieval and Renaissance Literature*, 4 (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2013), pp. 15-36; Eric Weiskott, 'Chaucer the Forester: The Friar's Tale, Forest History, and Officialdom', *Chaucer Review*, 47. 3 (2012), 323-36; and Glending Olson, 'Demonism, Geometric Nicknaming, and Natural Causation in Chaucer's Summoner's and Friar's Tales', *Viator*, 42. 1 (2011), 247-82.

<sup>49</sup> See R. T. Lenaghan, 'The Irony of the Friar's Tale', *Chaucer Review*, 7. 4 (1973), 281-94, and V. A. Kolve, "'Man in the Middle": Art and Religion in Chaucer's Friar's Tale', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 12 (1990), 5-46.

moral; this aspect of the tale emerges from this generic complexity.<sup>50</sup> Likewise, the Summoner provides an account of friars damned in hell, but with the culmination of his account not being that they are damned but hidden up the devil's arse; justice is supplemented by bawdy humour. This poise between *exemplum* and *fabliau* is resolved in favour of the second at the end of the dispute between the Friar and the Summoner, in the Summoner's Tale, which sees justice come to its corrupt friar not in the form of the damnation he deserves, but in his being outwitted and farted on twice, once through the merchant Thomas and again as he seeks restitution, through the Squire's *arsmetrik*. The *arsmetrik* is again humorously and narratively apt: it solves the narrative crux of the need for a perfect division of Thomas' fart among the convent of friars and does so on terms which fit friars' emblematic poverty and intellectual accomplishment – rather than proportionately punishing them for their crimes. By the end of the exchange between the Friar and the Summoner it is clear that both are worthy of damnation in their use of moral *exempla*, but it is no longer clear that this conclusion is a proper response to the text; any question of justice is forced into question through the prevalence of bawdy humour and farce.

The Summoner's Tale presents a narrative which occurs according to moral justice, but which translates that justice into a new sphere. Its morality is orthodox and clear – John Finlayson's claim that the tale is latently blasphemous accompanies a sensitive reading, but does not recognise that the tale does not bring any real sacramental practice into dispute; it should be noted that the dying Thomas has made a full confession to his parish priest at the start of the tale, committing to the correct

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<sup>50</sup> See the important case for the prevalence of humour in the Friar's Tale in John Finlayson, 'Art and Morality in Chaucer's Friar's Tale and the *Decameron*, Day One, Story One', *Neophilologus*, 89. 1 (2005), 139-52; see the further identification of the tale's complexity of the Tale's generic affiliations in Katie Homar, 'Chaucer's Novelized, Carnivalized Exemplum: A Bakhtinian Reading of the Friar's Tale', *Chaucer Review*, 45. 1 (2010), 85-105.



functioning of the ecclesiastical machinery in question.<sup>51</sup> Larry Scanlon has suggested that the tale bears out the implication, articulated through play, that moral authority is readily appropriable by the representatives of a secular sphere of landowning and mercantile interests through the ridicule of the ecclesiastical sphere. However, this not only depends on an unwarranted clarity in the separation of these circles, but also on the assumption that the lord, lady, and household are exercising something which operates in parallel to ecclesiastical censure.<sup>52</sup> Gower's satire in the *Mirour* and the *Vox* comes closer to appropriating an ecclesiastical mode of judgement for a lay position, and this position is approximated by the mutual condemnation of the Friar and the Summoner by the end of the Summoner's prologue; this is redirected here. However, the ending of the Summoner's Tale proposes a mode of judgement which operates on different terms to the real moral consequence demanded by salvation history and has different results. Rather than ending with a friar being urged to reform – or being consigned to hell – the Summoner's Tale ends with a friar being aptly humiliated and a lay household being invested in the narrative tidiness of this project rather than in any arbitration which is moral on the normal terms. They are pleased that the friars are to receive an equally shared fart, less because they deserve it and more because it is unexpected and fitting. This is a kind of narrative pleasure which stands in contrast to the demand for reform which Gower opened in his satire, and with which Chaucer had come into contact in his approach to moral consequence in the Friar's Tale and Summoner's Prologue. Nonetheless, this pleasure does not mean that moral or ecclesiastical judgement is excluded from a reading of the tale; it is obviously available, hence the argument of Scanlon and others. It is available in a way that does not obviate capacity for pleasure, along with the prospect that the pursuit of any such serious judgement might be foolish

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<sup>51</sup> See John Finlayson, 'Chaucer's Summoner's Tale: Flatulence, Blasphemy, and the Emperor's Clothes', *Studies in Philology*, 104. 4 (2007), 455-70.

<sup>52</sup> See Scanlon, *Narrative, Authority, and Power*, pp. 147-75.

response to the terms on which the poem operates. As a result, any judgement which can be made in response to it is rendered contingent.

This returns to the initial premise of the story-telling competition set out by Harry Bailly: to find who ‘telleth in this caas | Tales of best sentence and moost solaas’ (*CT*, I. 797-98). Harry does not complicate the aims of *sentence* and *solaas*, setting them out as terms which might well be fulfilled together. However, as addressed in the distinction between the kinds of play Minnis found at work in the *Legend* and the *Confessio*, *sentence* and *solaas* can cohabit in complex and mutually contradictory ways; moral consequence can inhere differently depending on the nature of the poetic play. The Monk’s Tale and the Nun’s Priest’s Tale form a double study in the ways in which *sentence* and *solaas* can complicate one another. Both tales use a narrative to illustrate a moral, and both develop a potentially dysfunctional relationship between *sentence* and *solaas* in this illustration. The Monk addresses the theme ‘For certein, whan that Fortune list to flee, | Ther may no man the cours of hire withholde’ (*CT*, VII. 1995-96) with an extended series of similar falls of prosperity into adversity, which are interrupted by the Knight and the Host due to the lack of pleasure in both this material and the Monk’s repetitive narration. The Monk’s Tale has received considerable recent critical attention through studies by Rob Gossedge, Eleanor Johnson, and Matthew Irvin, largely for the possibility that it might offer perspective on serious modes of reading and their perception in late fourteenth-century England.<sup>53</sup> It remains the case that those modes are found under parody; no matter the integrity of his tale, the Knight

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<sup>53</sup> See Rob Gossedge, ‘The Consolations and Conflicts of History: Chaucer’s Monk’s Tale’, in *Medieval English Literature*, ed. by Beatrice Fannon (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), pp. 95-111; Eleanor Johnson, ‘Tragic Nihilism in the *Canterbury Tales*: The Monk as Literary Theorist’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies*, 49. 1 (2019), 7-31; and Matthew W. Irvin, ‘The Narrative Tactics of Chaucer’s Monk’, *Chaucer Review*, 56. 1 (2021), 1-32. These studies are anticipated by Douglas Wurtele, ‘Reflections of the Book of Job and Gregory’s *Moralia* in Chaucer’s Monk’s Tale’, *Florilegium*, 21 (2004), 83-93.

and the Host are not satisfied with it and call for it to end. In turn, the Nun's Priest tells a single animal fable at great length, and with significant elaboration, to which the moral proves to be unclear, despite the closing lines which suggest that this is not the case:

But ye that holden this tale a folye,  
As of a fox, or of a cok and hen,  
Taketh the moralitee, goode men.  
(*CT*, VII. 3438-40)

This can be seen in the persistent tendency for critical discussion around the tale to turn to the place of predestination in the story; recent instalments in this discussion have considered the prospect that the final lines of the poem might recall enormous questions regarding future contingents – or might not.<sup>54</sup> It is unsurprising that the Nun's Priest Tale has been a classic locus for post-structuralist readings of Chaucerian poetics, in particular from Peter Travis, along with a site for pursuing other readings regarding the adventurous use of genre, as recently from Andrew Pattison and Joseph Turner.<sup>55</sup> One

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<sup>54</sup> See the possibility that the final lines revive the question of Bradwardine's theology on future contingents, in D. P. Baker, 'A Bradwardinian Benediction: The Ending of the Nun's Priest's Tale Revisited', *Medium Ævum*, 82. 2 (2013), 236-43, a position which should be set against the alternative possibility raised in Peter J. C. Field, 'The Ending of Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale', *Medium Ævum*, 71. 2 (2002), 302-06. See also the perspectives raised in Nicholas Jacobs, 'Nebuchadnezzar and the Moral of the Nun's Priest's Tale', in *Truthe is the Best: A Festschrift in Honour of A. V. C. Schmidt*, ed. by Nicolas Jacobs and Gerald Morgan, *Court Cultures of the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, 1 (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2014), pp. 109-26, and Elizabeth Scala, 'Quoting Chaucer: Textual Authority, the Nun's Priest, and the Making of the *Canterbury Tales*', in *New Directions in Medieval Manuscript Studies and Reading Practices: Essays in Honor of Derek Pearsall's Eightieth Birthday*, ed. by John Thompson, Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, and Sarah Baechle (South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 2014), pp. 363-83.

<sup>55</sup> See Peter Travis, *Disseminal Chaucer: Rereading the Nun's Priest's Tale* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2010), as well as Britton J. Harwood, 'Signs and/as Origin: Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale', in *Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Steve Ellis (London: Longman, 1998), pp. 209-24; Andrew John Pattison, 'Ironic Imitations: Parody, Mockery, and the Barnyard Chase in the Nun's Priest's Tale', *Chaucer Review*, 54. 2 (2019), 141-61; and Joseph Turner, 'Winking at the Nun's Priest', *Chaucer Review*, 55. 3 (2020), 298-316. These extend a premise held out in John Finlayson, 'Reading Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale: Mixed Genres and Multi-Layered Worlds of Illusion', *English Studies*, 86. 6 (2005), 493-510.

reason why the tale invites assertive critical readings is that it requires a critical framework to make it consequential; it is waiting for *a* reading to be formed for the protean material it offers. Chaucer is likely to have been familiar with Vincent of Beauvais' notes on using Aesopian fables for moral instruction:

Hec de fabulis esopi excerpere volui: quas & si forte plerumque liceat in sermonibus publicis recitare: quod etiam nonnulli prudentium faciunt propter audientium releuanda: qui talibus delectantur: simul & propter argumenta subiuncta que aliquid edificatonis [sic] habere videntur . nunquam tamen nisi caute & parce id estimo faciendum ne qui verbis sacris ad luctum penitentie deique deuotionem prouocari debent . ipsi per huiusmodi nugas in risum magis atque lasciviam dissoluantur . simul ne ad narrandas fabulas quasi licenter exemplo predicantium male informentur.

I wanted to excerpt these things from Aesop's fables in case it should perhaps please many to relate them in public sermons; which, indeed, some of the prudent do in order to relieve their audience, who are delighted by such things, as well as on behalf of the connected interpretations, which seem to have some element of edification. However, I never consider that this should be undertaken if not cautiously and sparingly, lest some - who should be provoked to the tears of penitence and devotion to God by the holy words – should more readily be dissolved into laughter and lasciviousness by this kind of nonsense; at the same time, lest they be badly informed by the example of the one preaching into telling fables as if freely.<sup>56</sup>

The two tales form a small drama on this problem. The Monk employs his narratives in such a way that they never threaten to overrule the edification which he offers, and this means that he loses his audience; as a result, his speech provides no edification at all.

The Nun's Priest ends up telling his fable *as if freely*; it is not clear what it is bound to as a point of reference other than the details of its own story world, even though the Priest justifies the existence of this through his appeal to its morality.

When this is combined with the depiction of the Monk in the General Prologue it raises a further problem of *solaa*s: the Monk is a figure of worldly appetites. When he declares his investment in tragedies, 'Of which I have an hundred in my celle', the

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<sup>56</sup> Vincent of Beauvais [Vincentius belvacensis], *Speculum doctrinale* (Strasbourg: R-Printer, c.1477), 4. 123.

prospect emerges that he possesses a kind of worldly appetite for a narrative which is ostensibly designed to engender *contemptus mundi* (CT, VII. 1972). This prospect cannot be resolved one way or the other – *sentence* and *solaas* blur in the act of narrative, and an audience is forced to confront, without available resolution beyond their own interpretation, the question of how the Monk tells stories, how they bear morality and pleasure, and how this is connected to the exercise of his social office. The same problem, of course, emerges with the Nun’s Priest. It is unclear how far he might expect his fable to be genuinely morally formative, and how this problem relates to his office as a Priest. This office is scarcely more fully filled out than that of the Second Nun; Carol Heffernan has been able to propose that the Nun’s Priest should be read as the same pilgrim as the Clerk out of his absence of independent characterisation.<sup>57</sup> It is differentiated by the Host’s comments on his sexual virility, something which relates to his social office and to the potential for licentiousness in his tale, not least in the sexual virility of the cock Chantecleer, but to which no clear resolution is forthcoming, not least given the absence to any response to this material from the Priest. Like the Monk and his Tale, the Priest’s narration raises social question about the role of narration in the Priest’s office and his relationship to the story he tells, as well as the office he holds, but these questions cannot be solved. They also operate at a degree removed from their moral implications, as any kind of humorous *solaas* without edification does not actually constitute a failure in itself within the playful space of the poem’s pilgrimage. It is not clear that the winning story would have to feature both *sentence* and *solaas*, and not one at the expense of the other. Should the Monk or the Nun’s Priest lack one of the two, this might incur judgement on them from an audience member inclined to exercise such judgement, but this does not mean that the tale does not operate successfully. Full

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<sup>57</sup> See Carol F. Heffernan, ‘The Nun’s Priest’s Identity and the Purpose of his Tale’, *Leeds Studies in English*, New Series 42 (2011), 43-52.

social judgement is not available, even as the prospect of judgement drives the operation of narrative.

Moreover, the clear way in which the narratives and moralities of the Monk's and Nun's Priest's tales are set against one another further increases the intricacy of the poem's space for play. These tales clearly recall the conditions on which the poem's own framing device operates, and invite an audience to return to that device and openly explore it. With this device being explored, both the constraints of the story-telling contest and the existence of the entire pilgrimage as a fiction are opened to consideration, and the prospect of a sustained moral judgement becomes further qualified. As in the *Confessio amantis*, the audience's response is likely to be of a moral order, but the nature of that moral order is not prescribed. It is this arrangement which makes the poetic space playful. Ultimately, this is not a tension to be resolved because it is the very tension that constitutes the *Canterbury Tales* as a poetic project. To return to the Summoner's Tale, it closes with the brief note, 'My tale is doon; we been almost at towne' (*CT*, III. 2294), simply closing the narrative space now that one leg of the journey has been filled with recreation – as the Host initially proposed, the story telling contest is in place 'to shorte withoure weye' (*CT*, I. 791). The contest occurs in a version of the real world, and the moral significance of actions in the world is not excluded from it; but this version of the real world is turned so that the rules do not necessarily appear to be the same, and it becomes a space for play with moral significance and its consequences which is able to sustain itself until the journey is over.

## Chapter 5

## Reasserting Consequence

Gower and Chaucer close the narrative frame of the *Confessio amantis* and the *Canterbury Tales*, respectively, in a way which accords with the wider tradition of *dits amoureux*. They end their story collections with a sequence which ensures that the circumstances in which their tales were both related and received are separated from the circumstances of the world outside the poem. At the end of the *Confessio*, Cupid takes love away from Amans, and Venus reveals that he is John Gower, too old to be a lover, sending him back to spend time with the rest of his poetic corpus, his books of moral virtue. At the end of the *Canterbury Tales*, the Parson delivers his tale, a morally orthodox treatise on penitence newly compiled from the most authoritative Latin sources, and completes the whole poem in its final anticipation of salvation without a return to the pilgrimage narrative. Should the audience receive the treatise with the reverence which it demands, and even employ it in their devotional life, then the Parson's introductory claim to direct the way on the pilgrimage to *Jerusalem celestial* would become true in the place of the fictional pilgrimage. These acts of closure differ from those found in *dits amoureux* in so far as they preserve some of the material which was explored in the preceding poetic space, because the narrative frame in the *Confessio* and the *Tales* admits subjects which demand recourse to moral consequence in the wider world, like the conversion of Constantine or the Second Nun's life of St Cecilia. Closing the narrative frame in the *Confessio* and the *Tales* does not simply close a space where normal morality was suspended, but a space in which a morality attentive to salvation history has to operate, if on uncertain terms, and was presented to the audience's judgement as a constituent part of the poem's play. Closing this space and setting the play aside in favour of full moral consequence entails constructing a

relationship between this moral play and a fully-fledged piece of moral writing by the poet.

The *Confessio*'s play with morality sits comfortably in Gower's corpus of morally responsible poetry: the development of the *Confessio*'s space for play came after Gower had already established, in the *Mirour de l'omme* and the *Vox clamantis*, a body of work attentive to salvation history and moral consequence, and he is able to refer back to the *Confessio* in later overtly moral works as a special and limited environment in which the complex condition of being in love is sympathetically and contingently explored. Closing the frame of the *Confessio* reasserts the controlling presence of Gower, the author, as a morally approved figure who does not generally inhabit such a space. Chaucer has to undertake a firmer act of closure in the *Canterbury Tales* because the *Tales* does not clearly fall on one side of the divide he had previously maintained between poetic, playful works and moral translations. Furthermore, the *Tales* departs from the *dit amoureux*'s focus on the experience of being in love, a premise which had shaped the use of the narrative frame from Jean de Meun onwards. Chaucer cannot close the frame by closing the love experience; he has to arrest the poetic as a playful mode more widely. He does this through deference to centralised ecclesiastical authority in the Parson's Tale: by creating a fictional *persona* which is a perfect embodiment of ecclesiastical injunctions on moral responsibility. This is followed by Chaucer's Retraction, in which he condemns the poetic half of his writing career up to the *Canterbury Tales*, and bases any hope of merit on his serious moral writing. Given that this Retraction occurs at the end of his most extensive and ambitiously fictionalising poetic work, it is impossible to determine how this statement is to be taken. Chaucer would have been aware of the maintenance of a poetic corpus around a biographical account of repentance in the lives of Ovid and Jean de Meun, but his conjunction of the *Canterbury Tales* and the Retraction resists the conventional



basis of this repentance on the process of ageing; Chaucer is at his most ambitiously fictionalising and his most thoroughly repentant at the climax of his career. He leaves his audience with the prospect that a resolution to the conflict between poetry and moral consequence is both inviting and impossible to achieve, a difficult condition which resembles his earlier articulation of poetic authority in the *House of Fame*.

### Moral Authority in Gower's Poetry

At the end of the *Confessio amantis* Gower closes the poem's narrative frame in a manner which is relatively conventional to the *dit amoureux* tradition. The *persona* Amans leaves love, realises that he is the aged John Gower, and returns to moral writing. Venus directs him to

“Go ther vertu moral duelleth,  
Wher ben thi bokes, as men telleth,  
Whiche of long time thou hast write.”  
(CA, 8. 2920-28)

The books which do not pertain to Venus' court, and which have been written 'of long time', must be assumed to be Gower's satirical-devotional works, the *Mirour* and the *Vox*, which are more clearly aligned with a fixed 'vertu moral' than is the *Confessio*. The presence of these works, which attend to the urgent demands of a progressing salvation history outside the *Confessio*, makes this a particularly firm act of closure. Gower has a body of morally responsible writing with which to align his position outside his occupation of the *persona* of Amans, which occurs within the narrative frame; he has even already established its moral terms in the text of the *Confessio* before taking up the Amans *persona*, given that his prologue sets out a brief estates satire, with an eye to the last judgement, which closely resembles the *Mirour* and the *Vox* – as outlined in Chapter Two of this thesis.

In a sense, Gower's abandonment of the Amans *persona* is an unusually conclusive closing of the narrative frame when compared to *dit amoureux* more widely, because it not only follows a resolution that his further pursuit of love would be sinful, but such a resolution as delivered to him by figures who preside over the narrative frame and the love experience. Genius tells Amans that his love cannot be achieved and is therefore a sin because it does not accord with reason, and Venus orders him to leave her court. This stands in contrast to the firmest prior departure from amorous love to be found in a *dit amoureux*, that in Froissart's *Joli buisson de jeunesse*. The first chapter of this thesis addressed the *Joli buisson* as a prominent case of a poet using the ageing process in conjunction with repentance to create a narrative frame. Froissart presents the *Joli buisson* as his last love poem, via a *persona* who has turned away from his youthful amorous passions to pursue a mature life of moral responsibility, then depicts that *persona* revisiting his experience in memory and a dream through the instigation of Venus, and finally shows him conclusively departing from his history as a lover, in prayer to the Virgin Mary. The *Joli buisson*'s modulation between the interior states of its *persona* in relation to his experiences in love gives the poem a significant amount in common with the *Confessio*. However, while Froissart presents Venus inviting his *persona* into the dream of his past love, he later presents him waking and overcoming this state through his own exercise of reason against temptation, considering the coming Day of Judgement:

En ceste imagination  
 Fis un peu de colation  
 Contre ma vie et mon afaire,  
 Et di je n'eüsse que faire  
 De penser a teles vaiseuses.  
 Car ce sont painnes et nuiseuses  
 Pour l'ame qui noient n'i pense.  
 Et qui il fault en fin de cense  
 Rendre compte de tous fourfais  
 Que li corps aura dis et fais,  
 Qui n'est que cendre et poureture;

Et la bonne ame est noureture  
De joie et de perfection.

While undertaking this process of imagination I took a short consideration of my life and my conduct, and I said that I had no business thinking of such idle things, for they are things painful and harmful to the soul which thinks nothing of them, and that in the final reckoning it is necessary to give an account of all misdeeds which the body, which is nothing but ashes and rot, will have said and done; and the good soul is the nourishment of joy and of perfection.<sup>1</sup>

In contrast to this exercise of virtue, in the *Confessio* it is Venus' servant Genius who tells Amans that he cannot progress further in love, and concludes their dialogue with a firm injunction, based on the moral demands of his own priesthood:

“For as of this which thou art inne,  
Be that thou seist it is a Sinne,  
And Sinne mai no pris deserve,  
Withoute pris and who schal serve,  
I not what profit myht availe.”

(CA, 8. 2087-91)

Up to this point the poetic mode of the *Confessio* has depended on Genius' dual responsibility as a servant of virtue and a servant of Venus (as the previous chapter has addressed); here, Genius admits that he now has to attend to the fullest morality available and advise Amans that the pursuit of amorous love, in his condition, can only be sin. The state of ambiguity which produced the poem's play with morality is met with a firm decision as the resolution to Amans' amorous state is found – by the same figure who has governed and facilitated that ambiguity. This decision is even upheld by Venus, who along with Cupid withdraws the state of love from Gower's heart, and sends him away from love to attend to a fuller morality fitting his age and situation. In contrast to Froissart, Gower does not present a process of discernment and virtuous action from his fallible *persona*, but a situation in which the amorous poetic world

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<sup>1</sup> Jean Froissart, *Le Joli buisson de jonece*, ed. by Anthime Fourrier, Textes litteraires français, 222 (Geneva: Droz, 1975), ll. 5153-65.

which his *persona* has turned to in idleness and play turns out to operate within limits set by its own governors. Along with the recourse to topics like the conversion of Constantine and the deposition of Pope Boniface VIII, which demand a recognition of salvation history's terms within the narrative frame, this process implies that Venus and Genius' love world has always operated in concert with proper morality, even if the connection may seem irregular or obscure. In Amans' departure from love, this obscure amorous morality is set within clear and final parameters at either end, and these operate in both directions: the frame and any conclusions an audience might take from the amorous pursuits, *exempla*, and moral interpretations proffered cannot be taken to articulate full morality operating under the normal consequences of salvation history; but neither can any conclusion drawn from the frame be taken to emerge in the absence of any morality, or out of an entirely different set of moral circumstances.

With the parameters of the frame and conclusion established, the space for play which they create is defined neither as something which has to be abandoned when it encounters moral consequence, nor as something representative of Gower's morality as a poet. Instead, this space is unique to the poetic work he has created, a poetic work which has a reasonably stable relationship with the morality articulated in his other poems. As his *persona* moves between internal states in the *Confessio*, Gower takes particular care to signal that it is doing so through the machinery of the text. At the start of Book I, as the authorial voice of the Prologue transitions into the voice of the Amans *persona*, he describes how no wisdom can foresee the course of love's actions:

And forto proven it is so,  
 I am miselven on of tho,  
 Which to this Scole am underfonge.  
 (CA, 1. 61-63)

The third-person Latin marginalia which Gower provides to the poem elucidate this *I am* as a declaration, the signal that Gower's *persona* has started to occupy the fictional figure of Amans who will later be cured of love:

Hic quasi in persona aliorum, quos amor alligat, fingens se auctor esse  
Amantem, varias eorum passiones variis huius libri distincionibus per singula  
proponit.

Here, as if in the *persona* of others whom love binds, the author, pretending to be a lover, sets out their various passions one by one, according to the various distinctions of this book.

(CA, 1. 61 *nota*)

This arrangement stands in contrast to the articulation of the *persona*'s different states by Froissart, who modulates the entire process through a stable first-person perspective. Gower's unusual exposition of this movement has rightly been foregrounded as integral to the *Confessio*'s poetry in the highly ethical readings provided by Kurt Olsson and Matthew W. Irvin. Olsson argues that the reader is set the ethical puzzle of disentangling contradictory and unresolved positions granted to Genius, Amans, and the poem's Latin head verses and Latin prose marginalia.<sup>2</sup> Taking a slightly different approach, Irvin argues that the drama of the *Confessio*'s conclusion consists of the likelihood that its audience has been able to apprehend a moral education in the poem as a whole, attending to the *exempla*, the sins, and the marginalia, and would be able to see that the poet's *persona* of Amans has not attained the same apprehension.<sup>3</sup> Andrew Galloway and Alastair Minnis identify this aspect of the *Confessio* as an unusual

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<sup>2</sup> See Kurt Olsson, *John Gower and the Structures of Conversion: A Reading of the Confessio amantis*, Publications of the John Gower Society, 4 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992).

<sup>3</sup> See Matthew W. Irvin, *The Poetic Voices of John Gower: Politics and Personae in the Confessio amantis*, Publications of the John Gower Society, 9 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2014). See also the attention to the *persona* as a poetic tool in Candace Barrington, 'Personas and Performance in Gower's *Confessio amantis*', *Chaucer Review*, 48. 4 (2014), 414-33.

moment in the relatively hesitant integration of scholarly apparatus into late medieval English poetry, and consider it alongside another unusual aspect of Gower's poetic corpus, the association of his texts with a body of colophons, shorter Latin poems, and short poetry applauding his achievement.<sup>4</sup> Robert Edwards has recently attended closely to Gower's creation of a stable poetic *persona* behind his corpus as a set of texts connected by these extensive commentaries, setting it in contrast to Chaucer's looser articulation of his poetic identity, while Siân Echard has steadily demanded that Gower's shorter Latin works be considered central to his cultivation of authority.<sup>5</sup> These methods of overtly articulating the relationship between the works in Gower's corpus help to preserve the *Confessio* as a unique work which operates on special moral conditions.

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<sup>4</sup> See Andrew Galloway, 'Gower's *Confessio amantis*, the *Prick of Conscience*, and the History of the Latin Gloss in Early English Literature', in *John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts*, ed. by Malte Urban and Georgiana Donavin, *Disputatio*, 13 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2009), pp. 39-70, and the response, Alastair J. Minnis, 'Inglorious Glosses?', in *John Gower in England and Iberia: Manuscripts, Influences, Reception*, ed. by Ana Sáez-Hidalgo and R. F. Yeager, Publications of the John Gower Society, 10 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2014), pp. 51-76; the second builds on observations on western European culture in the late middle ages and Renaissance more widely made in the culminating remarks of Alastair J. Minnis, *Magister amoris: The Roman de la rose and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 312-19, and in Alastair J. Minnis, 'Standardizing Lay Culture: Secularity in French and English Literature of the Fourteenth Century', in *The Beginnings of Standardization: Language and Culture in Fourteenth-Century England*, ed. by Ursula Schaefer (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 43-60. For further attention to the glosses in the *Confessio*, see Derek Pearsall, 'The Organisation of the Latin Apparatus in Gower's *Confessio amantis*: The Scribes and their Problems', in *The Medieval Book and a Modern Collector: Essays in Honour of Toshiyuki Takamiya*, ed. by Takami Matsuda, Richard Linenthal, and John Scahill (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 99-112.

<sup>5</sup> See Robert R. Edwards, *Invention and Authorship in Medieval England* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2017), alongside Siân Echard, 'Pre-Texts: Tables of Contents and the Reading of John Gower's *Confessio amantis*', *Medium Ævum*, 66. 2 (1997), 270-87; Siân Echard, 'With Carmen's Help: Latin Authorities in the *Confessio amantis*', *Studies in Philology*, 95. 1 (1998), 1-40; and Siân Echard, 'Last Words: Latin at the End of the *Confessio amantis*', in *Interstices: Studies in Middle English and Anglo-Latin Texts in Honour of A. G. Rigg*, ed. by Richard Firth Green and Linne R. Mooney (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 99-121.

Gower situates the *Confessio* as the third of his three principal works in the Latin prose colophon which generally follows the text in copies of the *Confessio* and the *Vox*, ‘Quia unusquisque’. In this summary he primarily presents the *Confessio* as a work which sits on the same lines of direct moral virtue as the French and Latin poems. The colophon summarises how:

Secundum Danielis propheciam super huius mundi regnorum mutacione a tempore regis Nabugodonosor vsque nunc tempora distinguit. Tractat eciam secundum Aristotilem super hiis quibus rex Alexander tam in sui regimen quam aliter eius disciplina edoctus fuit. Principalis tamen huius operis materia super amorem et infatuatas amantum passiones fundamentum habet.

He distinguishes the changes of the kingdoms over this world from the time of King Nebuchadnezzar down to this time according to the prophecy of Daniel. He also treats all of those things which King Alexander was taught according to Aristotle, both in his tutelage and elsewhere by his discipline. However, the principal matter of this work has its foundation on love and the infatuate passions of lovers.<sup>6</sup>

The Prologue and Book VII, which offer the most directly and stably moral material, are introduced first, and followed by what appears to be a contradictory premise for the rest of the work – introduced with *tamen* - that the poem is about amorous love, which has infatuate passions. Ostensibly, this frames the *Confessio* from a highly moral position, one similar to the critical perspectives of Yeager, Olsson, McCabe, and Irvin – namely, that the *Confessio* is a sophisticated ethical instrument that aims to make its audience discern the irrationality of amorous love and develop a form of virtue that can face down the threat such love presents to wise moral activity.<sup>7</sup> However, there is a

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<sup>6</sup> John Gower, ‘Quia unusquisque’, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), IV (1902), 360. Three versions of ‘Quia unusquisque’ are printed in John Hurt Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (London: Methuen, 1965), pp. 311-12, but this summary remains consistent throughout the three.

<sup>7</sup> See R. F. Yeager, *John Gower’s Poetic: The Search for a New Arion*, *Publications of the John Gower Society*, 2 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1990); Olsson, *Structures of Conversion*; T. Matthew N. McCabe, *Gower’s Vulgar Tongue: Ovid, Lay Religion, and English Poetry in the Confessio amantis*, *Publications of the John Gower Society*, 6 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011); and Irvin, *Poetic Voices*.

generosity in the afterthought which the colophon provides, that the greater part of the *Confessio* is dedicated to the infatuate state of being in love: this addendum admits that the *Confessio* is a work which explores passion at length, unlike Gower's other moral works, and which stands as a space in which such passions can be explored by a moral poet without the expression of moral judgement from the poet, or the demand for such judgement on any stable terms from the audience. This is a contained space – it is created by the postponement of demands which Gower attends to elsewhere, leaving an environment in which those demands are available for consideration but not immediately pertinent. The postponement of these demands facilitates a reading like Peter Nicholson's, which draws on the wider tradition of *dits amoureux*, and particularly the work of Machaut, to suggest that it is most feasible to consider love in the *Confessio* as a state which may be irrational and dangerous, but has the potential to be perfected into a form of amorous virtue – even though this cannot be achieved in the case of Amans.<sup>8</sup> However, it does not mean that a more moralising reading would be invalid. Instead, it is simply the case that there is nothing in the *Confessio* which strictly demands either a moral reading or a reading more open to the perfectibility of amorous love, in contrast to the morality of Gower's other work. In the light of this, closing the narrative frame in the *Confessio* is not a retraction but a way of preserving its work as a space which can be entered, exited, and retained in Gower's poetic corpus.

Works by Gower composed after the *Confessio* bear out this prospect of the poem containing a space in Gower's corpus of works which a form of play is possible, and to which an audience might wish to return. In the copies of the *Confessio* in Oxford, Bodleian Library, Fairfax 3 and Bodley 294, the *Confessio* is followed by Gower's *Traitié pour essampler les amantz marietz*, among some of his shorter Latin works. In

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<sup>8</sup> See Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics in Gower's Confessio amantis* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), pp. 9-30.



these two copies it is introduced with the following rubric, which positions the *Traitié* in relation to the *Confessio*:

Puisqu'il ad dit ci devant en Englois par voie d'essample la sotie de cellui qui par amours aime par especial, dirra ore apres en François a tout le monde en general un traitié selonc les auctours pour essampler les amantz marietz, au fin q'ils la foi de lour seintes espousailles pourront par fine loialté garder, et al honour de dieu salvement tenir.

Given that he spoke above in English about the foolishness of him who loves amorously in particular, by way of example, following this he will proceed to speak forth to the whole world in general with a treatise in French according to the *auctores* to give example to married lovers, to the end that they might guard the faith of their holy matrimony with true loyalty, and hold it firmly to the honour of God.<sup>9</sup>

The *Traitié* is a *ballade* sequence which uses *exempla pro* and *contra* to urge its audience to develop amorous love into sacramental and faithful marriage. The *exempla* are all highly condensed versions of stories delivered at length by Genius in the *Confessio*, and are used briefly in a lyric form to a set conclusion, rather than being delivered at length and lightly glossed with moralities, as they are in the *Confessio*. This conjunction of classical and amorous stories with a strict line of morality has intrigued critics: R. F. Yeager has observed that the sequence could either stand as a moralised work of amorous literature, very much in line with his own reading of the *Mirour* and the *Confessio*, or as a more strictly devotional piece, while Emma Lipton has recently attempted to find a separate line of context from parity between its stories and common law cases.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> John Gower, *Traitié pour essampler les amantz marietz*, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), I (1899), 379-92 (p. 379).

<sup>10</sup> See R. F. Yeager, 'John Gower's French and his Readers', in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England, c. 1100-c. 1500*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2013), pp. 135-45; R. F. Yeager, 'Twenty-First Century Gower: The Theology of Marriage in John Gower's *Traitié* and the Turn Towards French', in *The French of Medieval England: Essays in Honor of Jocelyn Wogan-Browne*, ed. by Thelma Fenster and Carolyn P. Collette (Cambridge: Brewer, 2017), pp. 257-71; and Emma Lipton, 'Exemplary Cases: Marriage as Legal

This struggle to make sense of the *Traitié*'s acknowledges the troubling way in which it employs much of the same material as the *Confessio* but presents it in so different a form as to demand a revised reading. For instance, it tells the story of Ulysses and Telegonus as an *exemplum* against infidelity, abbreviated to a single stanza:

Rois Uluxes pour plaire a sa caroigne  
 Falsoit sa foi devers Penolopé;  
 Avoec Circes fist mesme la busoigne,  
 Du quoi son fils Thelogonus fuist née,  
 Q'ad puis son propre piere auci tué.  
 Q'il n'est plesant a dieu tiele engendrure,  
 Le fin demoustre toute l'aventure.

King Ulysses, to please his flesh, broke his faith towards Penelope; he undertook this matter with Circe, of whom his son Telegonus was born, who later slew his own father in return. That such engendering is not pleasing to God – the end shows the whole story.<sup>11</sup>

The three lines before the refrain *Le fin demoustre toute l'aventure* parallel the ending of the *Confessio*'s marginal note to the same story (CA, 6. 1391-1781): 'filium nomine Thelogonum genuit, qui postea patrem suum interfecit: et sic contra fidei naturam genitus contra generacionis naturam patricidium operatus est' ('he begot a son by the name of Thelegonus, who later slew his father: and so the one begotten against the nature of faith committed patricide against the nature of generation'; CA, 6. 1393 *nota*).

The text of the *Confessio* features the same passage:

“Thing which was ayein kynde wroght  
 Unkindeliche it was aboght;  
 The child his oghne fader slowh,  
 That was unkindeschipe ynowh.”  
 (CA, 6. 1775-78)

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Principle in Gower's *Traitié pour essampler les amantz marietz*, *Chaucer Review*, 48. 4 (2014), 480-501. See also the observations on the uniqueness of the *Traitié* in Peter Nicholson, 'Gower's Ballades for Women', in *Studies in the Age of Gower: A Festschrift in Honor of R. F. Yeager*, ed. by Susannah Mary Chewning, Publications of the John Gower Society, 13 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2020), pp. 79-98.

<sup>11</sup> Gower, *Traitié*, 6. 15-21.

This similarity obscures the degree to which the story is reshaped in the *Traitié*. The stanza initially posits a crime in the first two lines, and provides its initial result at the end of the opening ABAB pattern, ‘Falsoit sa foi [...] Du quoi son fils Thelogonus fuist née’. This is followed by the tidy addition of the final consequence of this crime in the following rhyming line, ‘Q’ad puis son propre piere auci tué’; the narrative situation provided in the ABAB pattern meets its consequence in the doubling of the B-rhyme. The *Confessio*’s much longer telling challenges this simple pattern of a circumstantially detailed crime and an immediate, categorical punishment. In the *Confessio* the story is an *exemplum* against sorcery, classified as a species of Gluttony due to the immoderate desire which drives its pursuit; Telegonus’ birth was not simply unnatural because it was out of wedlock, but because “‘The child was gete in sorcerie, | The which dede al this felonie” (CA, 6. 1773-74). This sorcery is immediately set out as an offence committed by lovers in order to attain their desire, but its punishment in the story pertains to a wider illegitimate attempt to control the world. In the *Confessio*’s story, Ulysses does not commit the crime of adultery with Circe out of simple desire, but in response to her attempt to seduce him with sorcery, and through sorcery of his own; his sexual relationship with her is presented as secondary to this adversarial relationship. As a result, the story opens itself to much wider and more complex moral horizons. It provides a reflection on Ulysses’ standing as a man and a sorcerer:

“Men sein, a man hath knowleching  
 Save of himself of alle thing;  
 His oghne chance noman knoweth,  
 Bot as fortune it on him throweth:  
 Was nevere yit so wys a clerk,  
 Which mihte knowe al goddes werk,  
 Ne the secret which god hath set  
 Ayein a man mai nocht be let.”

(CA, 6. 1564-74)

The story bears this out – it explains how Ulysses walls his city of *Nachaie* to keep his son Telemachus in and imprisoned, in response to a premonition that he will be killed by his son, but it is this deed which leads to Telegonus' violence on his arrival, and ultimately to the killing. The *Traitié*'s version of this story aggressively restrains it, ensuring that the audience's attention is confined to its treatment of marriage, rather than to the interaction of magic, providence, and fortune which drive the nature and the interpretation of the narrative in the *Confessio*.

The *Traitié* similarly restrains the story of Rosamund and Alboin, relating it in three stanzas. The first stanza relates that King Alboin of the Lombards killed King Gurmund and married his daughter, Rosamund, and the second explains how this was an offence against God:

Tiel espousaile ja n'ert gracious,  
 U dieus les noeces point ne seintifie:  
 La dame, q'estoit pleine de corous  
 A cause de son piere, n'ama mie  
 Son droit mari, ainz est ailours amie;  
 Elmege la pourgeust et fist inmonde.  
 Cil qui mal fait, falt qu'il au mal responde.

Such matrimony was never met with grace, where God does not consecrate the nuptials: the lady, who was full of wrath on behalf of her father, did not love her rightful husband, but came to be a lover elsewhere; Helmege drove her to perjury and made her unclean. That which works evil is bound to be met with evil.<sup>12</sup>

Subsequently, the third stanza explains how the marriage ended badly – that Rosamund and Helmege poisoned Alboin and were in turn executed by the Duke of Ravenna for their crime. This is a particularly striking rendition of the story because it omits the central image in both the *Confessio*'s English text (*CA*, 1. 2459-2646) and its Latin marginalia, the transformation of Gurmund's skull into a cup, with which Rosamund is

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<sup>12</sup> Gower, *Traitié*, 11. 8-14.

unwittingly presented by Alboin with the invitation to ‘drink with her father’. The *Confessio*’s rendition of the story turns on this omitted detail, because it is an *exemplum contra* boasting, a species of Pride, which Alboin commits as he presents this cup, and then reveals that it is made from the skull of Rosamund’s father in order to outdo the achievements of his nobles in a prior tournament. It goes so far as to state that Alboin and Rosamund loved each other before this incident:

“His herte fell to hire anon,  
 And such a love on hire he caste,  
 That he hire weddeth ate laste;  
 And after that long time in reste  
 With hire he duelte, and to the beste  
 Thei love ech other wonder wel.”  
 (CA, 1. 2484-89)

It is this act of public humiliation which makes Rosamund hate Alboin and seek to kill him, and it is only as part of this design that Rosamund commits adultery with Helmege, deceiving him into it in order to secure his support against Alboin. The love between Rosamund and Helmege emerges through their collaboration in the plot:

“Anon the wylde loves rage,  
 In which noman him can governe,  
 Hath mad him that he can nocht werne,  
 Bot fell al hol to hire assent:  
 And thus the whiel is al miswent,  
 The which fortune hath upon honde.”  
 (CA, 1. 2620-35)

The result is a psychologically complex story which does not simply admit of any clear moral, despite its presentation as an *exemplum* against the vice of boasting. Both stories in the *Confessio* attend to the progress as works of fortune which are not foreseen by their protagonists, where the *Traitié* implies that they should have been foreseen and are the direct result of a particular sin. In Gower’s works more broadly these two positions are reconciled: in both the *Mirour* and the *Vox* he emphasises that fortune is illusory,

and entirely a manifestation of God's direct judgement in his providence – as addressed in Chapter Two. To a considerable degree the renditions of these stories in the *Confessio* and the *Traitié* can be seen as two different perspectives on the same matter. The stricter moralities provided in the *Traitié* are available as readings of the stories in the *Confessio*, albeit as readings which might seem unfittingly dogmatic; the story of Rosamund can be understood as the narrative of how she was bound to become unfaithful as a result of being forced into a godless marriage, and the story of Telegonus can be interpreted as Ulysses' punishment for his pursuit of carnal desire outside marriage. The result is a recapitulation of the *Confessio*'s narrative material in a form which does not employ the same kind of narrative frame: it is clear that the full weight of morality under the conditions of salvation history applies in the *Traitié*, and that the *exempla* urge compliance from a rational mind, rather than constituting ethical exploration rooted in an experience in which rational morality might be impeded. This recapitulation draws on the previous iteration of the stories in the *Confessio* on different terms, and does not prevent an audience from returning to the earlier text to pursue them in another way; indeed, the difference between its terms and those of the *Confessio* might invite an audience to reconsider both versions of the story beside one another, particularly when they are presented in the same manuscript.

In its presentation of the *Confessio* as a place where lovers' *sotie* is explored, Gower's Latin colophon appears to condemn the irrational state of amorous love, but the form of the *Traitié* does not admit this so unequivocally. Gower's adaptation of the *ballade* sequence to articulate a doctrinally assured moral position admits that marriage is the fulfilment of the experience of amorous love usually explored by *ballades*; in other words, that marriage is a way to lead the *sotie* of loving *par amours* to salvation, and that this is a legitimate way for Amans to live in accordance with reason, and an alternative to the renunciation of love undertaken by Gower at the end of the *Confessio*.

More widely, the *ballade* form explored the experience of being in love without resolution and often without context; the *ballade* was often a form composed in complement or competition between poets, with persistent reference to this limited and traditional subject matter.<sup>13</sup> The love experience the *ballades* investigated was closely aligned with the play of *dits amoureux*; *ballades* are a prominent constituent of the *forme-fixe* poetry which is regularly inserted into *dits amoureux*, as can be seen throughout the work of Machaut, Froissart, and Granson, and form a central feature in a certain strand of the tradition which attends to the writing, reading, and exchange of such poetry between the *persona* and other figures, most prominently represented by Machaut's *Livre du voir dit*, but also found in Froissart's *Prison amoureuse* and Granson's *Livre messire Ode*. In the *ballade* tradition the *Traitié* is unique. It has neither the investment in the love experience of other *ballades* nor the open approach to exploring morality in amorous love and in the wider world which prevails within the narrative frame of the *Confessio*. It asserts an orthodox moral line, using the *Confessio*'s stories to urge compliance with its moral injunctions regarding the sacrament of marriage. But its integration of material from the francophone amorous tradition and the *Confessio* means that it takes an amorous experience seriously, and its audience would know that such an experience could always be explored under less serious conditions by returning to the *Confessio*'s frame.

The extent to which the *Traitié* avoids exploring the experience of being in love – the usual subject of a *ballade* sequence – is striking, particularly given the extent to which Gower does so in his other *ballade* sequence, the *Cinkante balades*. Unusually for a *ballade* sequence, the *Cinkante balades* bears a note in its sole surviving copy in

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<sup>13</sup> The best recent summary of the *ballade* tradition, which includes discussion of Gower, is Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years' War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), particularly pp. 234-66.

the Trentham manuscript dedicating the first six *ballades* to lovers in the state of matrimony: ‘Les balades d’amont jesques enci sont fait especialement pour ceaux q’attendent lours amours par droite mariage’ (‘The *ballades* from the beginning up to this point are particularly composed for those who pursue their loves in rightful marriage’), followed by ‘Les balades d’ici jesques au fin du livre sont universeles a tout le monde, selonc les propretés et les condicions des Amantz, qui sont diversement travaillees en la fortune d’amour’ (‘The *ballades* from this point to the end of the book are universal to the entire world, according to the properties and the conditions of lovers, who are diversely afflicted in love’s fortune’).<sup>14</sup> The final *ballades* in the *Cinkante balades* situate love as a moral activity: *ballade* forty-eight (‘En toutz erreurs amour se justifie’) outlines the moral dangers in love, but emphasises its importance despite these; forty-nine (‘Lors est amour d’onour la droite miere’) treats the need to pursue love in accordance with reason and asserts that this would occur in marriage; fifty (‘Amour s’acorde a nature et resoun’) celebrates this righteous love; and fifty-one (‘Virgine et miere, en qui gist ma creance’) asserts that the highest form of love for a woman is devotion to the Virgin Mary. The *Cikante balades* is a *ballade* sequence unusually attuned to moral consequence, but still explores love as an experience in the mode typical of the form. The first stanza of *ballade* two, for instance, one of the *ballades* for married lovers, conforms to conventions also observed by Machaut and Froissart:

L’ivern s’en vait et l’estée vient flori,  
 De froid en chald le temps se muera,  
 L’oysel, qu’ainçois avoit perdu soun ny,  
 Le renouvelle, u q’il s’esjoiera:  
 De mes amours ensi le monde va,  
 Par tiel espoir je me conforte ades;  
 Et vous, ma dame, croietz bien cela,  
 Quant dolour vait, les joies vienont pres.

<sup>14</sup> John Gower, *Cinkante balades*, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), I (1899), 335-78 (5. 25 *nota* and 6. 1 *nota*).



Winter departs and summer comes in bloom, the weather changes from cold to hot, the bird, who had previously lost his nest, builds it anew, where he will rejoice: just so the world of my love goes, for such hope comforts me with such strength; and you, my lady, should believe this well: when pain goes, joys come soon after.<sup>15</sup>

The *Traitié* conceptually relies on such a love experience being something which is usually addressed in the *ballade* form even though it never pursues this tradition; at a glance, its direct approach to the integrity of marriage seems unnecessary, given that this is present along with the love experience in the *Cinkante balades*.<sup>16</sup> However, the *Traitié* indicates that Gower saw the value in addressing the firm position of orthodox morality at length and on its own terms, and also that he was willing for this exploration to depend on another body of less morally fortified poetry to be available to make such an exploration bear the necessary weight. Just as the *Traitié* depends on the *Cinkante balades* and other *ballade* sequences to work effectively, it is worth considering that its employment of *exempla* benefits from the more open exploration of these narratives and their potential pertinence to a love situation undertaken in the *Confessio*. To work effectively, the *Traitié* depends on the possibility of ‘la sotie de celui qui par amours aime’, and its resolved action to direct its readers away from this risks alienating an audience who have not explored that state of *sotie* at length for themselves. The *Traitié*’s stern case for the observation of matrimony benefits from recourse to another space in which its audience can explore its tales more fully as complex accounts, before returning to the *Traitié* to find moral orthodoxy asserted without obviating that

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<sup>15</sup> Gower, *Cinkante balades*, 2. 1-8. Butterfield, *Familiar Enemy*, pp. 234-66, addresses the exchange between Gower and the wider tradition; it can be supplemented by the recent Peter Nicholson, ‘Writing the *Cinkante balades*’, in *John Gower: Others and the Self*, ed. by Russell A. Peck and R. F. Yeager, Publications of the John Gower Society, 11 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2017), pp. 306-28, along with Nicholson, ‘Gower’s Ballades’.

<sup>16</sup> For further details of morality and the love experience in the *Cinkante balades*, see R. F. Yeager, ‘John Gower’s Audience: The Ballades’, *Chaucer Review*, 40. 1 (2005), 81-105.

other experience. The *Confessio* stands as a space in which Gower the moral poet can set out this *sotie* without formal condemnation, and allow an audience to develop a richer sense of the foundation of the doctrine he outlines in the *Traitié*, without that doctrine itself, or his morality as a poet, being compromised.

A brief examination of the shorter Latin poetry Gower composed after the *Confessio* upholds this sense that the moral openness of the *Confessio*'s narrative frame facilitates the articulation of a firm morality, on the grounds that it allows him to always defer to the moral play of the *Confessio* as a space which explores love's ethical complexity. Most of Gower's later Latin poetry took the form of satirical judgement of the state of the world like his early work, as can be found in the *Carmen super multiplici viciorum pestilencia* and the *Tractatus de lucis scrutinio*, both composed in the 1390s.<sup>17</sup> However, the uniformity of this work is belied by the widely circulated 'Est amor'/'Lex docet', two short bodies of Latin verse which are often found sequentially in manuscripts, and may be one continuous piece. 'Est amor' provides conventional material on the infatuate nature of the love experience at some length:

Est amor in glosa pax bellica, lis pietosa,  
 Accio famosa, vaga sors, vis imperiosa,  
 Pugna quietosa, victoria perniciososa,  
 Regula viscosa, scola deuia, lex capitosa [...]

Glossed, love is a violent peace, a holy strife, a notorious legal action, an uncertain fate, an imperious strength, a quiet fight, a terrible victory, a slippery rule, a school of transgression, an irregular law [...] <sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> For the dating of Gower's Latin works, see David R. Carlson, 'A Rhyme Distribution Chronology of John Gower's Latin Poetry', *Studies in Philology*, 104. 1 (2007), 15-55, with the supporting material in David R. Carlson, 'The Invention of the Anglo-Latin Public Poetry (circa 1367-1402) and its Prosody, esp. in John Gower', *Mittelateinisches Jahrbuch*, 39. 3 (2004), 389-406.

<sup>18</sup> John Gower, 'Est amor', in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), IV (1902), 359 (ll. 1-4).

Lex docet auctorum quod iter carnale bonorum  
 Tucius est, quorum sunt federa coniugiorum:  
 Fragrat vt ortorum rosa plus quam germen agrorum,  
 Ordo maritorum caput est et finis amorum.  
 Hec est nuptorum carnis quasi regula morum,  
 Que saluandorum sacratur in orbe virorum.

The law of the *auctores* instructs that the fleshly way of the good is safer, that which in which two who are joined are bound together: as the rose of the gardens gives a stronger scent than the bud of the fields, the order of matrimony is the head and the end of love affairs. This is like a rule on the habits for those bound together in the flesh, on which account it is consecrated in the world by those men who are to be saved.<sup>19</sup>

Macaulay does not make it clear whether these are separate texts or one continuous poem. At the risk of echoing Fisher's claim that Gower's works form one poetic continuity these passages might as well be read as one poem, as they bring together material which Gower attempts to associate through the corpus of his works: the complexity of the experience of being in love and the need to reiterate doctrine on what ought to be done with that experience.<sup>20</sup> In these passages, Gower proceeds to implicate himself:

Hinc vetus annorum Gower sub spe meritorum  
 Ordine sponsorum tutus adhibo thorum.

Thus old in years, under hope of merit, I, Gower, safe, go up to the marriage bed under the order of the espoused.<sup>21</sup>

Gower sets himself, the author, out as someone who knows love from experience as well as someone who is able to formulate a reliable moral response to it; he has been

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<sup>19</sup> John Gower, 'Lex docet', in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. by G. C. Macaulay, 4 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899-1902), IV (1902), 359 (ll. 1-6). 'Est amor' and 'Lex docet' are printed as a single poem in John Gower, *The Minor Latin Works with In Praise of Peace*, ed. by R. F. Yeager and Michael Livingston (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005).

<sup>20</sup> See John Hurt Fisher, *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (London: Methuen, 1965), p. 135.

<sup>21</sup> Gower, 'Lex docet', 4.359 (lines 7-8).

through love and found a rational fulfilment for it in marriage, a statement which is presumably supposed to be taken in connection with his documented marriage to Agnes Groundolf in 1398.<sup>22</sup> In this *persona* Gower both asserts the primacy of doctrine in his life as it is lived, but also his own susceptibility to experiences which are not doctrinally approved. On different terms to the *Confessio*'s employment of the *persona* Amans, Gower places his authorial *persona* in love; in this case he does not have to retreat from a passion which cannot be rendered rational, but is able to reach a virtuous equilibrium as a lover. Throughout his later career, Gower is occupied with exploring the different angles of love, using the complexity of experience as a foil for doctrine, and using doctrine to shape his articulation of that experience. As he does so, the *Confessio* does not recede from the body of Gower's poetry, and does not simply demand a reading which condemned amorous love in any particular form other than that of Amans' final intransigence as an old lover at risk of death in his pursuit of a young woman who does not return his affections. The space inside the *Confessio*'s narrative frame is not normal reality – it is a form of play – but that play is predicated on difficulties which underpin other, more morally serious, works, demanding a regular recourse to the narrative frame of the *Confessio* as a central poetic mode in Gower's corpus.

### Reinstating Morality in the *Canterbury Tales*

Chaucer has a different task to Gower when he closes the narrative frame at the end of the *Canterbury Tales*. The poem's pilgrimage narrative does not clearly depend on an altered state of awareness like that of Amans. Chaucer's *persona* does not perceive

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<sup>22</sup> See Martha Carlin, 'Gower's Life', in *Historians on John Gower*, ed. by Stephen H. Rigby and Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2019), <<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2102306&site=ehost-live>> [accessed 20 April 2021].

things according to normal moral consequence, but this is not because he is in a defined alternative state like that of being in love. He reorients the *dit amoureux* tradition of the hapless *persona* towards a new kind of social haplessness, in which poetic distortion applies to the conventions of satire, as addressed in the previous chapter, with the result that the space inside the narrative frame orients all things in the world towards a state of play. This is sometimes a play in touch with a degree of morality which is not conclusive and which can be suspended, similar to that found in Gower's *Confessio*. As addressed in the previous chapter, the Friar's Tale is both comical according to a narrative and linguistic logic and a morally coherent condemnation of summoners; the audience is free to emphasise one of these aspects or the other according to their inclination. Further to this, the *Tales* are prone to developing a looser form of moral play that the *Confessio*, as can be seen in the resolution of the mutual condemnation of the sinful Friar and Summoner into the broad bawdiness and linguistic play of *fabliau*, or the resolution of the contrasting imbalance of tale and morality in the Monk's Tale and the Second Nun's Tale, which resolves itself into an attention to the artifice of the entire competition, as has been discussed in the previous chapter. This play is not entirely detached from moral consequence, but it is also not subject to the usual strictures of responsible morality, and even turns the terms of satire and penitential articulation into play – the grounds on which Gower established his position as a moral poet. To close this narrative frame, Chaucer has to assert genuine morality against a state of play which has access to the complete body of morality, rather than a state dominated by an affect which makes it difficult for normal morality to apply.

Chaucer achieves this in the Parson's Tale by shaping a tale which embodies ecclesiastical authority as far as possible for a layman writing poetry; the fiction of the Parson's *persona* is a re-presentation of correct conduct in his social role, and therefore

pitched against the principles of satire on which Chaucer has developed the *Tales*' moral play.<sup>23</sup> The Parson introduces his tale by explaining how he intends

“To shew yow the wey, in this viage,  
Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrymage  
That highte Jerusalem celestial.”  
(*CT*, X. 49-51)

This responds to the request that he tell a fable, something he bluntly refuses to do:

“Thou gestest fable noon ytoold for me,  
For Paul, that writeth unto Thymothee,  
Repreveth hem that weyven soothfastnesse  
And tellen fables and swich wrecchednesse.”  
(*CT*, X. 31-34)

‘Thou getest fable noon ytoold for me’ could have been phrased more generously with a modal verb and the second person plural pronoun – such as ‘Ye may noon fable get ytoold for me’, but this abruptness only anticipates the way that the Parson’s Tale responds to the rest of the poem. Chaucer sets the spiritual pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem as a counterpart to the fictional pilgrimage to Canterbury, and one which is actually true – not a fable – if the audience takes it seriously and implicates themselves within it as a spiritual reality; this process allows the extraordinarily capacious story telling competition to be ended.<sup>24</sup>

Siegfried Wenzel has influentially divided critical responses to the Parson’s Tale into perspectivist and teleological responses: those which take the Parson as a *persona*

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<sup>23</sup> The Parson is addressed on these terms in Gregory Roper, ‘Dropping the Personae and Reforming the Self: The Parson’s Tale and the End of the *Canterbury Tales*’, in *Closure in the Canterbury Tales: The Role of the Parson’s Tale*, ed. by David Raybin and Linda Tarte Holley, *Studies in Medieval Culture*, 41 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), pp. 151-76.

<sup>24</sup> For an account of the Parson’s Tale as a response to the other tales which is fundamentally different from them as it calls an audience to recalibrate their memory of them, see Takami Matsuda, ‘Performance, Memory, and Oblivion in the *Parson’s Tale*’, *Chaucer Review*, 51. 4 (2016), 436-52.

position to be considered on the same level of the other pilgrims, and those which attempt to account for the Parson's position as the last tale teller by privileging his authority.<sup>25</sup> There is a sense in which the Parson's Tale raises this dichotomy directly: the Parson is a *persona* telling a tale, but this *persona* is built from authoritative material that admits no rebuke in a manner which is unusual for a poetic *persona*. As will become evident in the course of this argument, this process excludes the likelihood that the Parson embodies any position of Wycliffite sympathy, despite Chaucer's close relationships with the prominent early Wycliffite knights identified by Bruce McFarlane.<sup>26</sup> The notion that the Parson is supposed to be understood as a Wycliffite is a recurrent critical position, and one which is occasionally connected to the Parson's exposition of theology in the vernacular.<sup>27</sup> It is readily available for reasons which Anne Hudson classically outlined: the Parson is identified as a model of correct godly conduct on terms which were also employed by the Wycliffites, terms which echo wider ecclesiastical currents of the late fourteenth century, and which can be quite traditional, reaching back to the disciplinary reforms of the Third and Fourth Lateran Councils, and which underpin the development of *pastoralia*, well rooted in Anglo-Norman French long before the Wycliffite movement.<sup>28</sup> The Parson is a parish rector whose activities directly stem from the Gospels and the work of the Apostles, without mediation:

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<sup>25</sup> See Siegfried Wenzel, 'The Parson's Tale in Current Literary Studies', in *Closure in the Canterbury Tales: The Role of the Parson's Tale*, ed. by David Raybin and Linda Tarte Holley, *Studies in Medieval Culture*, 41 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), pp. 1-10.

<sup>26</sup> See K. B. McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972).

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, Frances M. McCormack, *Chaucer and the Culture of Dissent: The Lollard Context and Subtext of the Parson's Tale* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2007); Katherine C. Little, *Confession and Resistance: Defining the Self in Late Medieval England* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2006), pp. 79-100; or the strong association with the vernacular in Derrick G. Pitard, 'Sowing Difficulty: The Parson's Tale, Vernacular Commentary, and the Nature of Chaucerian Dissent', *Studies in the Age of Chaucer*, 26 (2004), 299-330.

<sup>28</sup> See Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), pp. 390-92; see also Anne Hudson, Review of Frances

He was [...] a lerned man, a clerk,  
 That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche;  
 His parissshens devoutly wolde he teche.  
 (CT, I. 480-82)

Cristes loore and his apostles twelve  
 He taughte; but first he folwed it hymselfe.  
 (CT, I. 527-28)

He is largely defined against the situation of the contemporary Church through a set of negatives – the abuses which he does not undertake, like many other priests:

He sette nat his benefice to hyre  
 (CT, I. 507)

He was a shepherde and noght a mercenarie.  
 And though he hooly were and vertuous,  
 He was to synful men nat despitous,  
 Ne of his speche daungerous ne digne.  
 (CT, I. 514-17)

He waited after no pompe and reverence,  
 Ne maked hym a spiced conscience.  
 (CT, I. 525-26)

In a note in the *Riverside Chaucer*, Wenzel claims that the depiction of the Parson in the General Prologue is ‘devoid of irony’, objecting to a critical tradition that would take both the Parson and his Tale as pieces of comic moral exaggeration – an extreme perspectivist reading by Wenzel’s later taxonomy.<sup>29</sup> Again, this raises an absence which

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M. McCormack, *Chaucer and the Culture of Dissent: The Lollard Context and Subtext of the Parson’s Tale*, *Medium Ævum* 77. 2 (2008), 373, and the important preliminary notes on the relationship between Wycliffite vernacularism and Anglo-Norman tradition in Nicholas Watson, ‘Lollardy: The Anglo-Norman Heresy?’, in *Language and Culture in Medieval Britain: The French of England, c. 1100-c. 1500*, ed. by Jocelyn Wogan-Browne et al. (Woodbridge: York Medieval Press, 2009), pp. 334-46.

<sup>29</sup> See CT, explanatory note to I. 477-528; Wenzel, ‘Current Literary Studies’. A good version of the case for this tradition is well made in John Finlayson, ‘The Satiric Mode of the Parson’s Tale’, *Chaucer Review*, 6. 2 (1971), 94-116; this position is to be contrasted to more moderate perspectivist arguments like that made in Judith Ferster, ‘Chaucer’s Parson and the “Idiosyncracies of Fiction”’, in *Closure in the Canterbury Tales: The Role of the Parson’s Tale*, ed. by David Raybin and Linda Tarte Holley,



attests to a disparity between the Parson and the other Canterbury pilgrims. By the time the Parson tells his tale, most orders of society have been mocked in one way or another, and it is a departure for the Parson to emerge as a clergyman who is not a hypocrite. Moreover, the genre in which the Parson himself works has been parodied. The friar who visits Thomas on his sickbed in the Summoner's Tale seems to be able to improvise *pastoralia* on the Seven Deadly Sins with some virtuosity. He produces a discourse on wrath which stands as a broad amplification of the word *Ire*, repeating it at regular intervals with notes on its characteristics on each occasion, and reflecting on its own considerable length:

“Ire is a synne, oon of the grete of sevene,  
 Abhomynable unto the God of hevene;  
 And to hymself it is destruccion.  
 This every lewed viker or person  
 Kan seye, how ire engendreth homycide.  
 Ire is, in sooth, an executour of pryde.  
 I koude of ire seye so much sorwe,  
 My tale sholde laste til to-morwe.  
 And therefore preye I God bothe day and nyght  
 An irous man, God sende hym litel myght!  
 It is greet harm and certes greet pitee  
 To sette an irous man in heigh degree.  
 Whilom ther was an irous potestat,  
 As seith Senek, that, durynge his estaat,  
 Upon a day out riden knyghtes two [...]”  
 (CT, III. 2005-20)

This friar seems to have been well trained in accord with ecclesiastical legislation: he can extemporise a short treatise on the sin of wrath and its relationship to other sins (father of Homicide, executor of Pride). There are, however, troubling aspects to his virtuosity. His ability to deliver a set of three *exempla* on wrath, apparently from Seneca, is impressive, but is largely lifted from John of Wales' *Communiloquium* with minimal mediation, a standard source for pastoral guidance, albeit one often neglected

by modern critics and scholars.<sup>30</sup> The *Communiloquium* is ordered *ad status*: its pastoral guidance and material is arranged to match the places of people a pastor might advise in society, but this is something which the friar has not absorbed. Instead of discerning Thomas' actual status, the friar has barely let him speak by this point in the tale, having discoursed on the virtue of his own fasting and his own convent's need for donations, and is obstructing the correct machinery of the Church by attempting to obtain a confession after Thomas' parish priest has already done so. His choice of the sin of wrath seems to be based on Thomas' hostility to him asking for money, and the offhand comments of Thomas' wife - 'Chideth him weel, for seinte Trinitee! | He is as angry as a pissemyre, | Though that he have al that he kan desire' (*CT*, III. 1824-26).<sup>31</sup> This injunction to tell Thomas off because he is angry on his deathbed does not constitute a correct address *ad status*. The friar refers to his own pastoral guidance on wrath as something which 'every lewed viker or person | Kan seye', and this lays down a gauntlet, challenging the Parson's pastoral advice to be any better (*CT*, III. 2008-09).

The Parson's Tale is able to invite a genuine spiritual response and resist this invitation to satire by attending to the most authoritative ecclesiastical material available and fitting it to an immediate audience through work – the fundamental task of *pastoralia*. This labour is pre-empted in Parson's connection to the Ploughman in the General Prologue (*CT*, I. 529-32). It remains possible that an as-yet undiscovered compilation might have brought together some of the material used in the Parson's Tale

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<sup>30</sup> See Christine Richardson-Hay, 'The Summoner's Prologue and Tale', in *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Robert Correale and Mary Hamel, 2 vols (Cambridge: Brewer, 2005), II (2005), 449-78. For the importance of John of Wales, see Ralph Hanna, 'The Wisdom of Poetry: John of Wales' Defense', *Journal of Medieval Latin*, 27 (2017), 303-26, along with Robert Pratt, 'Chaucer and the Hand the Fed Him', *Speculum*, 41. 4 (1966), 619-42. There is no modern edition of any of John of Wales' works; Richardson-Hay reproduces quotations from Pratt, which are taken from the Strasbourg edition of 1489.

<sup>31</sup> For further attention to the vice of wrath in the Summoner's Tale, see Marc B. Cels, "'An Irous Man": Anger and Authority in the *Summoner's Tale*', *Chaucer Review*, 53. 3 (2018), 308-35.

already and reduce the degree to which Chaucer must have been ‘a trewe swynker’ like the Ploughman, but as it stands he is likely to have worked through a considerable amount of formal, scholastic, and authoritative Latin writing to compile a treatise which addresses the subject of penitence with a focus which has no parallel in English *pastoralia* from this period – and is scarcely rivalled in the body of material available in French.<sup>32</sup> The sacrament of penitence had been at the heart of the development of a full ecclesiastical education and disciplinary system from the end of the twelfth century onwards, and had therefore stood at the centre of the development of *pastoralia*. However, even works of *pastoralia* primarily dedicated to the subject of penitence have a tendency to become sufficiently capacious that they dilate this focus into a broader encapsulation of Christian doctrine and practice; this is particularly clear in the *Manuel des péchés* and its English translation by Robert Manning of Brunne, *Handlyng Synne*, long texts which cover a wide variety of rudimentary theological topics in their search for a remedy for sin – they outline the Articles of the Faith, address how each of the Ten Commandments can be broken, and explore sacrilege against each of the Seven Sacraments, for instance. The Parson’s Tale is unique in its concentration on the three components of penitence – contrition, confession, and satisfaction – with a restrained elaboration of the Seven Deadly Sins under the second, as well as its employment of highly authoritative material freshly adapted from Latin. Ranging across its sources, the Parson’s voice brings this material together; it excerpts them with an agonistic strictness, and adjusts their prosody with a set of consistent habits, in order to give us a sense that the Parson – or Chaucer – has digested a body of material in circulation across Europe and assimilated it to his own perception of the pastoral needs of those in

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<sup>32</sup> See Richard Newhauser, ‘The Parson’s Tale and its Generic Affiliations’, in *Closure in the Canterbury Tales: The Role of the Parson’s Tale*, ed. by David Raybin and Linda Tarte Holley, *Studies in Medieval Culture*, 41 (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2000), pp. 45-76.

front of him, in the English language. In this process, Chaucer has to write himself out as far as possible; in doing this he is able to close any sense of the poetic and of play.

Knowledge of the sources for the Parson's Tale has benefited enormously from the attentions of Siegfried Wenzel: the main form of the tale, divided into contrition, confession, and satisfaction, is derived from the final section of Ramon de Peñafort's *Summa de penitentie*, a highly authoritative text which circulated across western Europe, composed by the compiler of the *Decretals* of Gregory IX.<sup>33</sup> Studies which perceive a Wycliffite inclination in the Parson's Tale have tended to overlook the centrality of its sources to the international structures of ecclesiastical discipline.<sup>34</sup> As well as using Peñafort throughout, Chaucer draws his descriptions for the seven deadly sins from a text at least similar to an insular Latin abbreviation of the *Summa de vitiis* by Peraldus, the sole canonical authority on the sins to have an influence which matched that of Peñafort. Wenzel has named this abbreviation *Quoniam*, from its incipit. The remedies which follow each sin are taken from a treatise on the virtues which seems to have originated in England, and which usually follows an abbreviation of *Quoniam* which has the incipit *Primo*. This text has been edited by Wenzel as the *Summa de remediis anime*, or *Postquam*. Behind the Parson's Tale lies a body of material which stood at the heart of ecclesiastical discipline across western Europe, filtered by some use

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<sup>33</sup> See Siegfried Wenzel, 'The Source for the *Remedia* of the Parson's Tale', *Traditio*, 27 (1971), 433-53, and Siegfried Wenzel, 'The Source of Chaucer's Deadly Sins', *Traditio*, 30 (1974), 351-78. On the wider authority of Peñafort, particularly via John of Freiburg's Thomist rehandling, see Leonard E. Boyle, 'The *Summa confessorum* of John of Freiburg and the Popularization of the Moral Teachings of St. Thomas and Some of his Contemporaries', in *St. Thomas Aquinas, 1274-1974: Commemorative Studies*, ed. by Armand A. Maurer et al., 2 vols (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 1974), II. 245-68, complemented by Leonard E. Boyle, 'The Quodlibets of St. Thomas and Pastoral Care', *The Thomist*, 38. 2 (1974), 232-56.

<sup>34</sup> This also applies a recent study of a mode of apparently radical contritionism in the Tale, Karen A. Winstead, 'Chaucer's Parson's Tale and the Contours of Orthodoxy', *Chaucer Review*, 43. 3 (2009), 239-59.

in England, but still in a state where it would largely be suitable for those preparing to undertake pastoral work, rather than for their flock.

As this material is worked up into the Parson's Tale, it is tailored to meet the needs of a double flock: both the imaginary pilgrims, to a certain extent, and the audience of the *Canterbury Tales*. The General Prologue gives us the Parson as a man who was not

daungerous ne digne,  
But in his techyng discret and benygne.  
(*CT*, I. 517-18)

This can be seen in the way in which he renders his Latin material. Peñafort presents a journey out of hell to safety, through penitence:

Post abyssum et laqueos Babylonis, de quibus superius aliqua memoravimus ad cautelam, videlicet ut cognoscantur, et cognita melius evitentur, restat ut ad portum quietis ac serenitatis aeternae, solliciti festinemus, inquirentes viam rectam, necessariam et infallibilem, quae quidem est paenitentia. Circa quam videndum/ quid ipsa sit et unde dicatur; de tribus actionibus paenitentiae; de tribus speciebus ejusdem; quae sint necessaria in vera paenitentia; de clavibus; de remissionibus; de impedimentis paenitentiae, et aliqua alia dubitabilia interponemus circa istam materiam.

After the abyss and snares of Babylon, somewhat of which we have brought to memory as a caution, in fact so that they might be known, and known, might be better evaded, it remains that we carefully hurry to the port of quiet and eternal serenity, searching for the right, necessary, and infallible way, which is indeed penitence. Regarding which it should be seen: what it is and wherefore it has its name; of the three actions of penitence; of the three species of the same; what things are necessary in true penitence; of the keys; of the remissions; of the impediments to penitence, and some other things of doubt which we might insert on this matter.<sup>35</sup>

This passage occurs near the end of Ramon's *Summa* – his treatment of the variety of sin has been much more capacious than his treatment of penitence will be. After the

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<sup>35</sup> Ramon de Peñafort, *Summa de paenitentia*, ed. by Xaverio Ochoa and Aloisio Diez (Rome: Commentarium pro religiosis, 1976), 3. 34.

variety of the text, it remains (*restat*) to outline the conditions of the single culminating remedy. Through the classical *topos* of the literary work as a sea voyage, a ship to be directed to the end of its journey, Ramon presents penance as a strictly unifying force – in line with his elaboration of the topic in a work devoted to the information of Church discipline through the work of priests, and his wider attention to the compilation of canon law. In the Parson's Tale this is softened:

“Stondeth upon the weyes, and seeth and axeth of olde pathes (that is to seyn, of olde sentences) which is the goode wey, and ye shal finde refresshyng for youre soules etc.”/ Manye ben the weyes esprituels that leden folk to oure Lord Jhesu Crist and to the regne of glorie./ Of whiche weyes ther is a ful noble wey and a ful covenable, which may nat fayle to man ne to womman that thurgh synne hath myscoon fro the righte wey of Jerusalem celestial;/ and this wey is cleped Penitence, of which man sholde gladly herken and enquire with al his herte/ to wyten what is Penitence, and whennes it is cleped Penitence, and in how many maneres been the acciouns or werkynges of Penitence,/ and how manye spesces ther been of Penitence, and whiche thynges apertenen and bihoven to Penitence, and whiche thynges destourben Penitence.

(*CT*, X. 74-82)

The Parson's patience in rebuking sinners seems to be at work here: he generously suggests that 'Manye ben the weyes esprituels that leden folk to oure Lord Jhesu Crist and to the regne of glorie' – much as Chaucer's treatise on the astrolabe accepts that the workings of an astrolabe can be set out 'right as diverse pathes leden diverse folk the righte way to Rome' – when the penitence which the Parson discusses was nonetheless an annual legal requirement, and is declared to be the only way of remitting sin committed after baptism.<sup>36</sup> The 'weyes' in the plural are soon discarded, as it turns out, in favour of 'a ful noble wey and a ful covenable' as a remedy to one who 'hath myscoon fro the righte wey'. In his opposition to fables, the Parson would appear to hold that the tales up to this point have been the abyss and snares of Babylon, but his dedication to the fitting instruction of his flock prevents this, and leads him to take an

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<sup>36</sup> See Geoffrey Chaucer, *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, ed. by John Reidy, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 661-84 (Prologue. 39-40).

approach which echoes Chaucer's own approach to pragmatic instruction when met with the varieties of language. From the start, his voice is established as one content to adjust the weight of the Latin sources behind the tale. This is followed by the first instance of a rhetorical manoeuvre characteristic of the Parson's Tale: where Peñafort lists the topics he will proceed to cover with parataxis, relying on the basic principles of *ordinatio* – 'de tribus actionibus paenitentiae; de tribus speciebus ejusdem; quae sint necessaria in vera paenitentia; de clavibus; de remissionibus; de impedimentis paenitentiae, et aliqua alia dubitabilia interponemus circa istam materiam' – the Parson builds these up into a rhetorical phrase, supplying conjunctions and even verbs, with a return to Penitence at the end of each item in place of the simple 'circa quam'; 'to wyten what is Penitence, and whennes it is cleped Penitence, and in how many maneres been the acciouns or werkynges of Penitence,/ and how manye spesces ther been of Penitence, and whiche thynges apertenen and bihoven to Penitence, and whiche thynges destourben Penitence.' He speaks like a man who is – slightly pedantically - taking care that his audience knows how all of his tale will come back to the way of penitence, with a diligence that hopes that they will reciprocate in their efforts to follow this way.

This approach stands behind all of the material which Chaucer worked into the tale. Where Peñafort sets out the three parts of penitence, which Chaucer adapts to structure the Parson's Tale in its broadest frame, the Parson treats them similarly:

Sequitur videre quae sint necessaria in paenitentia vera et perfecta. Et quidem tria, videlicet: cordis contritio, oris confessio, operis satisfactio. Joannes, Os aureum: 'Perfecta paenitentia cogit peccatorum omnia libenter sufferre; in corde enim contritio, in ore confessio, in opere tota humilitas, haec est fructifera paenitentia.' Quia enim tribus modis Deum offendimus, scilicet [...]

It follows to see what things might be necessary in true and perfect penitence. And there are a certain three, namely: contrition of heart, confession of mouth, satisfaction in works. John Chrysostom: 'Perfect penitence makes sinners suffer all things freely; indeed, contrition in heart, confession in mouth, full humility in

works, this is fruitful penitence.’ For, indeed, we offend God in three ways, namely [...]<sup>37</sup>

Now shaltow understande what is bihovely and necesarie to verrey parfit Penitence. And this stant on three thynges:/ Contricioun of Herte, Confessioun of Mouth, and Satisfaccion./ For which seith Seint John Crisostom, “Penitence destreyneth a man to accept benygnely every peyne that hym is enjoyned, with contricioun of herte, and shrift of mouth, with satisfaccioun, and in werkyng of alle manere humylitee.” And this is fruytful penitence agayn three thynges in which we wrath oure Lord Jhesu Crist: [...]

(CT, X. 106-09)

The three conditions themselves are brief - as far as can be maintained in English’s analytic syntax as opposed to Latin’s inflection - but Chrysostom’s ‘*fructifera paenitentia*’ is taken forward to relate to the three ways in which we offend God. Where Peñafort uses Chrysostom as an *auctor* and then moves on, the Parson takes Chrysostom’s claim and elucidates its operation in regard to the next item. The insertion of *agayn* vitally supplies the nature of the relationships between them; and he does this for a personalised audience, one with which he is acquainted and able to adjust his teaching to support, and address in the informal second person singular - ‘Now shaltow’. He works across the scholastic distinctions, like someone who is bringing a degree of judgement to the way he summarises the penitential process, born of experience supervising – and undertaking – penitence; his ‘agayn’ reads between the lines which separate them. This is applied very broadly in the Tale, because it is frequently composed of the *distinctiones* from the Latin treatise – they are translated, then stripped of all of the supporting quotations and qualifications, before the next is introduced; this approach is not far from that which David D’Avray has recognised friars undertaking as they expand the widely circulated model templates for sermons.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Peñafort, 3. 34.

<sup>38</sup> See David D’Avray, *The Preaching of the Friars* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985).



In its most extreme form, this reading across the *distinctiones* can be used to collapse the separation between different items entirely. We can see this in the section on Humility, from *Postquam*:

Et primo de humilitate, quia est ipsa remedium superbie [...] Secundum Bernardum: 'Humilitas est virtus qua quis verissima sui cognitione vilescit ipse sibi'. Alia est huiusmodi: Humilitas est voluntaria mentis inclinatio, intuitu conditoris vel proprie fragilitatis.

And firstly regarding humility, because this is the remedy for pride [...] According to Bernard: 'Humility is a virtue by which one reviles himself from a very true knowledge of himself.' Or otherwise in this manner: humility is a wilful inclination of the mind, with regard to one's creator or one's fragility.<sup>39</sup>

Now shul ye understonde which is the remedie agayns the synne of Pryde; and that is humylitee, or mekenesse./ That is a vertu thurgh which a man hath verray knoweleche of hymself, and holdeth of hymself no pris ne deyntee, as in regard of his desertes, considerynge evere his freletee.

(CT, X. 475-76)

There is no 'Alia est huiusmodi' in the English, a second theoretical approach to the virtue of humility. Instead, 'in regard of his desertes' is supplied to support the paraphrase of how a humble man 'vilescit ipse sibi' – 'holdeth of hymself no pris ne deyntee'; it then connects the 'alia' statement, which is abridged because its first half – 'voluntaria mentis inclinatio' has already been covered in 'holding of hymself'. Rather than an authoritative statement from Bernard, followed by an alternative position, the Parson's Tale gives us a single observation which combines aspects of both, attending to the operation of humility in a more nuanced sense which suggests that these statements were always observations on the same virtue, and that the virtue is the true object of the pastor's attention.

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<sup>39</sup> *Summa virtutum de remediis anime*, ed. by Siegfried Wenzel (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1984), p. 77.

This work of adaptation is not just literary: it is meant to draw the audience to the spiritual and sacramental process of penitence. Chaucer is unusual as a layman in his work with such authoritative sources and in such attention to the sacrament and its operation. As a writer he had produced a body of moral translations, but Innocent III's *De miseria humanis conditione*, pseudo-Origen on Mary Magdalen, and Boethius' *Consolation* do not enjoin sacramental action in the same way as the Parson's Tale, and they do not combine and modulate *auctoritates* with the same intricacy. Through the model of a parish priest who is not a satirical figure – who conducts his duties correctly – Chaucer is able to employ a poetic *persona* to connect authoritative doctrine to his audience without it being compromised by his interim status as a layman and a poet. In practice, a town rector would not be likely to be reformulating Peñafort and Peraldus; the terms of Chaucer's satire imply that he would not be resident in his parish at all – a prospect which is not in fact convincingly borne out by the historical record – but if he were, much of his work could be shaped by recourse to standard manuals by scholars on the duties of a parish priest, like William of Paull's *Oculus sacerdotis* or John of Burgh's *Pupilla oculi*.<sup>40</sup> The *persona* of the parish priest works for Chaucer because it is the basic element of the Church's machinery, responsible for the immediate and local dissemination of doctrine and the sacraments: Chaucer uses his *persona* to represent the priest's work correctly exercised. In this process, Chaucer has to write himself out as far as possible, along with any sense of the poetic and of play. We are left with the most efficient use of words available to him for the advancement of what is morally necessary at the present juncture in salvation history, and the prospect of the poem's

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<sup>40</sup> See David Lepine, "The Parson", in *Historians on Chaucer: The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Stephen H. Rigby with the assistance of Alastair J. Minnis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), pp. 334-53. For William of Paull and John of Burgh, see the foundational study, Leonard E. Boyle, "The *Oculus sacerdotis* and Some Other Works of William of Pagula", *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> Series. 5 (1955), 81-110.

fiction unmaking itself in favour of a real response to the moral demands made by the wider narrative of a society which has to prepare itself for the Day of Judgement beyond the space given to the play of poetry.

### Poetry and Devotion after the *Canterbury Tales*

The Retraction leaves the *persona* of the Parson and brings Chaucer's authorial identity into contact with moral consequence. Having closed the narrative frame to meet the demand for serious and real morality, he presents himself as a penitent departing from play in the face of this demand. However, Chaucer resists a conclusion similar to that of Gower in which moral play can sit with other forms of morality as long as the narrative frame is in place. He catalogues his works and returns to the division between his poetry and his moral translations, condemning all of his poetic works apart from anything in the *Canterbury Tales* which his audience might find that morally beneficial:

I biseke yow mekely, for the mercy of God, that ye preye for me that Crist have mercy on me and foryeve me my giltes;/ and namely of my translacions and enditynges of wordly vanitees, the whiche I revoke in my retracciouns [...] But of the translacion of Boece de Consolacione, and othere bookes of legendes of seintes, and omelies, and moralitee, and devocioun,/ that thanke I oure Lord Jhesu Crist and his blisful Mooder, and alle the seintes of hevене,/ bisekyng hem that the from hennes forth unto my lives ende sende me grace to biwayle my giltes and to studie to the salvacioun of my soule.

(CT, X. 1088-90)

Set to study for his salvation away from the worldly vanities of poetry, Chaucer looks like Gower when he is sent away by Venus with prayer beads. However, he is not laying aside a *persona* in this passage in the same way as Gower does: the poetic frame of the *Tales* has already been effectively closed by the Parson's Tale. Instead, he is speaking as the author and purporting to lay aside most of the poetic aspects of his career. This remains a voice inflected by the Parson's Tale; the Retraction ostensibly resembles a confession, and it ends with a prayer which is closely aligned with the

Tale's final notes on satisfaction and its hope for the joys of salvation. Chaucer's voice leaves us intent on a process. He thanks Christ and the Virgin Mary for his devotional works:

bisekyngge hem that they from hennes forth unto my lyves ende sende me grace to biwayle my giltes and to studie to the salvacioun of my soule, and graunte me grace of verray penitence, confessioun and satisfaccioun to doon in this present lyf,/ through the benigne grace of hym that is kyng of kynges and preest over alle preestes, that boghte us with the precious blood of his herte,/ so that I may been oon of hem at the day of doom that shulle be saved.

(*CT*, X. 1089-91)

He is engaged in a present participle, in the act of beseeching until it reaches its result, repeating his hope that he may attain salvation; this act works through the process outlined in the Parson's Tale, that of contrition, confession, and satisfaction, and meanwhile waits for God's grace – as promised in the death of Christ.<sup>41</sup> However, Chaucer's authorial *persona* who speaks in the Retraction cannot deliver a fictional confession like that which closes the *Confessio*'s narrative frame because the fiction of the *Canterbury Tales* has already been closed, and also cannot deliver an act of penitence as immediate as that which the audience themselves could have performed through implementation of the Parson's guidance. The Retraction is a statement which asks the audience to believe in an act of penitence which Chaucer has undertaken elsewhere, and which constitutes Chaucer's enduring spiritual state – up to his death and beyond.

As an act which is postulated within Chaucer's own absent interiority, some of the details of this penitence are unclear. It is certain that Chaucer allows some of the *Tales* to stand, revoking of 'the tales of Caunterbury, thilke that sownen into synne' (*CT*, X. 1086), but it is unclear on which terms this judgement can operate. The

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<sup>41</sup> This active intention is more thoroughly outlined in Ian Johnson, 'The Ascending Soul and the Virtue of Hope: The Spiritual Temper of Chaucer's *Boece* and *Retracciouns*', *English Studies*, 88. 3 (2007), 245-61.

audience is asked to presume that Chaucer knows which tales he expects to incline to sin, but there is no way in which they can gain access to this judgement. In his unpublished PhD thesis, Jason Michael Herman situates this determination in the context of the *accessus* tradition's heading of *utilitas*, and interprets it as a liberating prospect, in which an audience can discern for themselves which tales pertain to virtue and which to sin.<sup>42</sup> However, this overlooks the extent to which the Retraction reiterates the division between poetry and moral writing which Chaucer also makes in both versions of the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, and condemns all poetry other than this uncertain part of the *Canterbury Tales* – there is a good case for only the ‘bookes of legendes of seintes, and omelies, and moralitee, and devocioun’ like the Parson’s Tale and the Second Nun’s Tale to be taken as virtuous in this instance. Broadly, Chaucer’s final assessment of poetry’s potential to contribute to moral virtue seems to be intensely pessimistic. Coming out of the Parson’s Tale and its model of ecclesiastical authority, he only presents a career of serious moral writing as available to him in the future, without the poetic dimension it previously had; the moral play of the *Canterbury Tales* is admitted to have the potential for some good, but only in so far as it is able to avoid moral compromise. However, this remains a pessimism situated on the grounds of uncertainty.

Further to this a large number of critics consider this a parodic retraction. This view is defensible, given that the Retraction only survives in the text of the *Canterbury Tales*, a poetic project which it, at least in part, disowns, and given that it details Chaucer’s poetic works with more thoroughness than his moral translations. Anita Obermeier, in a full study of the palinode from antiquity to the fifteenth century, Peter Travis, in a more theoretical reading, and, recently, Sebastian Sobiecki, emphasise the

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<sup>42</sup> See Jason Michael Herman, ‘Intention, Utility, and Chaucer’s Retraction’ (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Arizona, 2009).

extent to which it can be read as a parodic form at the end of the *Tales*, bowing to the severest condemnation imaginable in order to cohere a Chaucerian corpus, even if this is set out as a corpus of mingled virtue and vice.<sup>43</sup> Most of these readings evince too comfortable a reading of parody on the grounds that it is hard to stably deny.

Obermeier's understanding that Chaucer means to invoke a spirit of free interpretation via Romans 15:4 needs to be nuanced by the observations by Ian Johnson on the use of the same verse, for instance.<sup>44</sup> Moreover, reading the Retraction as a parody risks eliding the extent to which it resists any stable reading at all. There remains no critical consensus as to how Chaucer meant the Retraction to be interpreted, attesting to the difficulty of the text; views continue to range from Robertsonian readings which take the Retraction as a key to a master-meaning meant to underpin all of the following tales to strongly relative positions like those of Obermeier and Sobecki, or more lightly relative positions like that outlined in Marion Turner's recent Chaucer biography, which allows both Chaucer a degree of genuine piety in the Retraction but also suggests that the act of penitence he outlines is no more than one more contingent position in the range of the poetic perspectives set out in the *Canterbury Tales*.<sup>45</sup> Derek Pearsall's contribution to this range of positions is of particular note – he takes the Retraction to be a genuine abandonment of art by Chaucer, but one which is circulated together with a major work of art which it largely abandons, accepting that the Retraction operates in a sphere of responsibility higher than the poem it accompanies.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See Anita Obermeier, *The History and Anatomy of Auctorial Self-Criticism in the European Middle Ages*, Internationale Forschungen zur Allgemein und Vergleichenden Literaturwissenschaft, 32 (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 210-20; Peter Travis, 'Deconstructing Chaucer's Retraction', *Exemplaria*, 3. 1 (1991), 135-58; and Sebastian Sobecki, 'Lydgate's Kneeling Retraction: The *Testament* as a Literary Palinode', *Chaucer Review*, 49. 3 (2015), 265-93.

<sup>44</sup> See Johnson, 'Ascending Soul'.

<sup>45</sup> Marion Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), pp. 504-05.

<sup>46</sup> See Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1985), pp. 288-93.

Alongside this unresolved, and quite finely nuanced, debate, there is a steady tradition of scholarship which attempts to resolve the difficulties posed by the Retraction by proposing a historical context which makes it easier to interpret. Charles Owen Jr. famously proposed that all surviving manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* only attest to scribal arrangements of Chaucer's untidy literary remains, further suggesting that the Parson's Tale and Retraction were an early draft of an ending to the collection, no longer current when the General Prologue was composed.<sup>47</sup> Matthew Wolfe has suggested that the Retraction might not have been meant to be tied to the *Tales* in particular, but to accompany Chaucer's works more generally, while Míceál F. Vaughan has suggested that the Parson's Tale and Retraction were a separate composition, not meant to be part of the *Tales*.<sup>48</sup> All of these arguments propose an arrangement that pre-empts any of the available textual evidence, which is univocal in placing the Retraction at the end of the Parson's Tale, and the Parson's Tale at the end of the *Tales*, save for in the cases in which the Parson's Tale is reproduced outside of the wider collection – such as Longleat House MS 29, which contains the Parson's Tale, and Cambridge, Magdalene College, MS Pepys 2006 which contains the Tale of Melibee and the Parson's Tale.<sup>49</sup> It should also be noted that only 28 of 83 MSS of the *Tales* have the Retraction, due in part to its status as a short passage at the end of the *Tales*, often missing when the poem is preserved as a single codex. There is no easy

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<sup>47</sup> See Charles A. Owen Jr, *The Manuscripts of the Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer Studies, 17 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991), and Charles A. Owen Jr, 'What the Manuscripts Tell Us about the Parson's Tale', *Medium Ævum*, 63. 2 (1994), 239-49.

<sup>48</sup> See Matthew C. Wolfe, 'Placing Chaucer's "Retraction" for a Reception of Closure', *Chaucer Review*, 33. 4 (1999), 427-31; and Míceál F. Vaughan, 'Creating Comfortable Boundaries: Scribes, Editors, and the Invention of the Parson's Tale', in *Rewriting Chaucer: Culture, Authority, and the Idea of the Authentic Text, 1400-1602*, ed. by Thomas A. Prendergast and Barbara Kline (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1999), pp. 45-90.

<sup>49</sup> See *CT*, textual note to X.

solution to the interpretative difficulty posed by Chaucer's Retraction, although it poses sufficiently urgent interpretative problems to demand such an attempt.

Chaucer is likely to have anticipated that the Retraction would not seem firmly conclusive, and also the extent to which readers would have wanted to provide a solution. This of course has been proposed by commentators, and has been identified as classically Chaucerian; both Rosemary Potz McGerr and, more recently, Timothy S. Miller has treated Chaucer's investment in unresolved ending as a shaping habit of his poetic corpus.<sup>50</sup> However, there remains no consensus as to the nature of the uncertainty Chaucer is likely to have pursued. As addressed in Chapter One of this thesis, the *dit amoureux* tradition had already established repentance as a way of closing the narrative frame for poetry, building on the commentary tradition around the works of Ovid and traditions which emerged around Jean de Meun. However, the biographical framings of Ovid and Jean both depend on a change in their stages of life, with their old age prominent in both of the works of repentance attributed to them, *De vetula* and the *Testament*. These works of repentance both look back on a career in which youth's amorous follies are supposed to have been undertaken a long time ago. Chaucer's repentance is not separated from his poetic career by any period of time at all but is presented immediately after the close of his longest and most capacious poetic work. Instead of a process of ageing – a passing of time in the real world – it is the passage of the *Canterbury Tales* which intervenes between his poetic folly and his repentance. The fictional journey, which has formed a poetic frame, is closed by coming to an end, and it is this end of the poem which leads Chaucer to turn away from his poetry to address his moral state. This process is adumbrated throughout the poem by the prospect of an

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<sup>50</sup> See Rosemary Potz McGerr, *Chaucer's Open Books: Resistance to Closure in Medieval Discourse* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998), and Timothy S. Miller, 'Closing the Book on Chaucer: Medieval Theories of Ending and the Ends of Chaucerian Narrative' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Notre Dame, 2014).



arrival at St Thomas' shrine, an ecclesiastical contrast to the Tabard in Southwark. Chaucer's time of moral realisation and conversion seems to happen in no real time at all, but to be strangely submerged in his relation of a poetic narrative, to emerge fully at its end. Some critics have managed to trace a sense of this ending as emergent earlier in the *Tales*, but it nevertheless occurs within the course of the single text, and of the relatively short journey from Southwark to Canterbury.<sup>51</sup> Chaucer's poetic achievement and his departure from poetry are forced into the same space, with the result that it is not easy to disentangle one from the other; it is falsifying to accept either the departure as a playful, parodic version of devotion, or Chaucer's poetic corpus reduced to only those devotional texts which can be safely determined to be serious within the *Canterbury Tales*, at its moment of achievement.

Not only is Chaucer likely to have anticipated his audience encountering this as an interpretative difficulty, but it recalls a climactic moment in his most extensive account of poetic authority, the *House of Fame*. In a search for love tidings which can be the basis of further poetry, which parodies the divine poetic journeys presented in Alain de Lille's *Anticlaudius* and Dante's *Commedia*, Chaucer's *persona* ends up in the whirling wicker house of rumour:

And sometyme saugh I thoo at ones  
 A lesyng and a sad soth sawe,  
 That gonne of aventure drawe  
 Out at a wyndowe for to pace;  
 And, when they metten in that place,  
 They were achekked bothe two,  
 And neyther of hem moste out goo  
 For other, so they gonne crowde,  
 Til ech of hem gan crien lowde,  
 "Lat me go first" "Nay, but let me"  
 And here I wol ensuren the,

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<sup>51</sup> For a reading that reaches back as far as the Second Nun's Tale, see Eleanor Johnson, *Practising Literary Theory in the Middle Ages: Ethics and the Mixed Form in Chaucer, Gower, Usk, and Hoccleve* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), pp. 122-65; see also the treatment of the Manciple's Tale in Jamie C. Fumo, *The Legacy of Apollo: Antiquity, Authority, and Chaucerian Poetics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2010). pp. 202-28.

Wyth the nones that thou wolt do so,  
 That I shal never fro the go,  
 But be thyn owne sworn brother!  
 We wil medle us ech with other,  
 That no man, be they never so wrothe,  
 Shal han on [of us] two, but bothe  
 At ones, al besyde his leve,  
 Come we a-morwe or on eve,  
 Be we cried or stille yrouned.”  
 Thus saugh I fals and soth compounded  
 Togeder fle for oo tydyng.<sup>52</sup>

This vision occurs deep in a poetic frame: it is not a categorical statement about the nature of truth, or even of truth in poetry, but a piece of poetry which playfully raises the proposition that this could be the nature of truth in poetic art. It does not suggest that truth and falsehood are inherently connected, but that they are not separable from one another under the conditions of their iteration. This is a paradox which fascinated Chaucer and which underpins his final articulation of the relationship between his poetry and moral consequence. As a writer, Chaucer is attentive to serious moral matters outside of his poetry, and in the *Canterbury Tales* he expands the boundaries of his poetic work to include the exploration of matters of real morality. However, at the end of this process he does not admit that moral consequence can be reliably found anywhere other than in his moral works, in a statement which he would have recognised to be deeply implicated in his poetic work, and even to suggest a desire for a form of poetic canonisation like that which Ovid received and which Gower anticipated in his work. This second condition does not undo the first. The result is an articulation of what it might be to be a poet attentive to serious morality, and one which stands in contrast to that made by Gower: a suggestion that it is not within the condition of the poetic to be able to make any serious pronouncement on morality, but that a poet’s attempt to address moral consequence would inevitably become a poetic statement, and subject to

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<sup>52</sup> Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, ed. by John M. Fyler, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 347-74 (ll. 2088-2108).

the conditions of the poetic office set out by Lactantius – ‘that things which really happened are handed over into other appearances through oblique figurations, turned over with a certain dignity’.<sup>53</sup>

It is fitting that the closest text which Chaucer produced to an *ars poetica* was not the *Canterbury Tales*, but an earlier poetic work which clearly stood on one side of the dividing line between his body of religious translations and his poetry in the *dit amoureux* tradition. For Chaucer poetry is and remains an art of distortion as in the *dits amoureux*. Like Gower and Clanvowe he maintains a profound interest in serious religious writing as part of his career; but he does not see a space in which a serious agenda can be laid out for the poetic without the very form of the poetic being denatured. His best example of what poetry is and might be is itself poetic; his art of poetry as a useful medium is indefinitely deferred. This is a reasonable answer for a poet to give to answer to the question of what inherent good poetry might bring, because any attempt to answer that question which resolves the poetic into another medium risks leaving the poetic as wasteful – the fundamental problem any late medieval defence of the poetic had to overcome, which sat at the heart of the art of distortion pursued in the *Roman de la rose* and the *dits amoureux*. While he has a much more developed interest in addressing moral consequence directly than is common in this international tradition – an interest shared by his contemporaries Clanvowe and Gower – Chaucer is sympathetic to the wider tradition, and does not move beyond it in the terms on which he defends poetry; in this respect he stands in contrast to Gower. He does not outline philosophical grounds for the good of poetry, because to do so

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<sup>53</sup> Lucius Caecilius Firmianus Lactantius, *Divinarum institutionum libri septem*, ed. by Eberhard Heck and Antonie Wlosok, 4 vols (Munich: Saur, 2005-2011), I (2005), 1. 11. 24.

categorically would not itself be a poetic response; he responds in a way that invites the question and makes it a meaningful one to ask.

## Conclusion

Chaucer and Gower are not remembered as particularly religious writers. Their reputation is primarily based on the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio amantis*. The most prominent British imprints of classic literature, Penguin Classics and Oxford World Classics, present the works of Chaucer in the form of five versions of the *Canterbury Tales* from Penguin, along with a translation in Oxford World's Classics; two versions of *Troilus and Criseyde* in Penguin and a translation in Oxford World's Classics; and a collection of love visions in Penguin.<sup>1</sup> Neither series offers any works by Gower, but a sense of the centrality of the *Confessio* to Gower's present reputation can be seen in the dedication of five out of the thirteen volumes in the Publications of the John Gower Society series issued so far to the *Confessio* in particular, with none of the others concentrating on a single text.<sup>2</sup> This thesis has argued that the *Tales* and the

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<sup>1</sup> Penguin offer Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. by Jill Mann (London: Penguin, 2005); Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, trans. by Nevill Coghill (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1951); Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales: A Selection*, ed. and trans. by Colin Wilcockson (London: Penguin, 2008); Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales: The First Fragment*, ed. by Michael Alexander (London: Penguin, 1996); Geoffrey Chaucer and Peter Ackroyd, *The Canterbury Tales: A Retelling by Peter Ackroyd* (London: Penguin, 2010); Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, ed. by Barry A. Windeatt (London: Penguin, 2003); Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, trans. by Nevill Coghill (London: Penguin, 1971); and Geoffrey Chaucer, *Love Visions*, trans. by Brian Stone (London: Penguin, 1983). Oxford offer Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, trans. by David Wright and Christopher Cannon (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Geoffrey Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, trans. by Barry A. Windeatt (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> See J. D. Pickles and J. L. Dawson, *A Concordance to John Gower's Confessio amantis*, Publications of the John Gower Society, 1 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1987); *Gower's Confessio amantis: A Critical Anthology*, ed. by Peter Nicholson, Publications of the John Gower Society, 3 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1991); Kurt Olsson, *John Gower and the Structures of Conversion: A Reading of the Confessio amantis*, Publications of the John Gower Society, 4 (Cambridge: Brewer, 1992); María Bullón-Fernandez, *Fathers and Daughters in Gower's Confessio amantis: Authority, Family, State and Writing*, Publications of the John Gower Society, 5 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2000); T. Matthew N. McCabe, *Gower's Vulgar Tongue: Ovid, Lay Religion, and English Poetry in the Confessio amantis*, Publications of the John Gower Society, 6 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2011); and Matthew W. Irvin, *The Poetic Voices of John Gower: Politics and Personae in the Confessio amantis*, Publications of the John Gower Society, 9 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2014).

*Confessio* emerge from a tension in Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe's works, which ran through their reception of the *dit amoureux* tradition; while their religious works attend to full moral consequence, their poetry suspends this consequence to develop a form of literary play. This tension produced the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio amantis* as texts which introduce moral material to that play, but these texts do not bring the tension to a point of resolution. Both innovate with a form of moral play, but the *Tales* ends by rephrasing the initial problem, leaving it as a demanding but insoluble prospect, while the *Confessio* is subordinated to a wider corpus of morally responsible poetry which Gower continued to arrange up to his death. The later prominence of the *Tales* and the *Confessio* as literary works of primary importance makes this development recede into the background; these poems themselves are set at the centre of Chaucer and Gower's achievement, as something that makes their more directly religious writing, and even Chaucer's poetic works which deviate less extensively from the *dit amoureux* tradition, look eccentric in comparison. Our perspective on the *Tales* and the *Confessio* differs significantly from that which their authors are likely to have held in their lifetime. Chaucer and Gower always saw the *Tales* and the *Confessio* as an emergent mode, set within the complex literary problem of the kind of moral consequence poetry is able to have.

However, this awareness seems to have eroded relatively early in the circulation of their work. By the end of the fifteenth century Chaucer and Gower appear to have become primarily famous for the *Tales* and the *Confessio*. This is particularly evident in the loss of two of Chaucer's religious translations, the pseudo-Origen *De Maria Magdalena* and Innocent III's *De miseria humanae conditionis*, along with the *Book of the Lion* listed in the Retraction, in comparison to the survival of the *Canterbury Tales*

in more than eighty manuscripts and fragments.<sup>3</sup> However, it is less often noted that many of Chaucer's surviving poetic works beyond the *Tales* have weak textual traditions: the *Book of the Duchess* survives in three manuscripts and Thynne's printed edition; the *House of Fame* survives in three manuscripts and the independent printed witnesses of Caxton and Thynne's editions, none of which contain an authorial ending to the poem; and none of the twelve manuscript witnesses to the *Legend of Good Women* preserves a complete text of the nine surviving legends, setting aside the problem that the text is evidently unfinished and all copies of Chaucer's Retraction refer to a greater number of heroines in the book.<sup>4</sup> *Troilus*, the *Parliament of Fowls*, the *Boece*, and the *Treatise on the Astrolabe* have more secure traditions, but the *Boece* only features an attribution to Chaucer in two of the surviving copies – London, British Library, MS Additional 16165 and Cambridge, Pembroke College, MS 215 – in contrast to seven attributions in copies of the *Astrolabe*.<sup>5</sup> A similar situation prevails for

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<sup>3</sup> See *CT*, Introduction to Textual Notes; see also Linne R. Mooney et al., *The DIMEV: An Open-Access, Digital Edition of the Index of Middle English Verse* (1995-), the *Canterbury Tales* (DIMEV 6414), <<https://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=6414>> [accessed 21 April 2021].

<sup>4</sup> See Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Book of the Duchess*, ed. by Larry D. Benson, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 329-46, (Introduction to Textual Notes); Geoffrey Chaucer, *The House of Fame*, ed. by John M. Fyler, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 347-74 (Introduction to Textual Notes); and *LGW*, Introduction to Textual Notes. See also Mooney et al., *The Book of the Duchesse* (DIMEV 2181), <<https://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=2181>> [accessed 21 April 2021]; Mooney et al., *Hous of Fame* (DIMEV 1620), <<https://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=1620>> [accessed 21 April 2021]; Mooney et al., *Legend of Good Women* (DIMEV 177), <<https://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=177>> [accessed 21 April 2021].

<sup>5</sup> See Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*, ed. by Vincent J. DiMarco and Larry D. Benson, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 383-94 (Introduction to Textual Notes); *Troilus*, Introduction to Textual Notes; Geoffrey Chaucer, *Boece*, ed. by Ralph Hanna and Traugott Lawler, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 395-470 (Introduction to Textual Notes); Geoffrey Chaucer, *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, ed. by John Reidy, in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. by Larry D. Benson et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), pp. 661-84 (Introduction to Textual Notes); and Tim William Machan, Introduction to Geoffrey Chaucer, *Boece*, ed. by Tim William Machan, Middle English Texts, 38 (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008), pp. xi-xli (p. xi). See

Gower's works. The *Confessio* survives in more than fifty manuscripts and fragments, while none of Gower's other works survives in more than fifteen copies, and many in sole copies (as is the case for the *Mirour de l'omme*, the *Cinkante balades*, and 'In Praise of Peace'). More than ten copies of the *Vox clamantis* survive, but the poem did not see print; copies of the *Traitié* and the shorter Latin works are largely preserved in the same manuscripts as the *Confessio* and the *Vox*.<sup>6</sup> Very few medieval audiences would have encountered a version of Chaucer or Gower's work presented as the corpus the poet envisaged; they are most likely to have encountered a playful story collection without wider contextualisation – a work which is set apart from the wider concerns of society through the employment of a narrative frame, and not one which directs its audience to a more developed moral agenda, or forms part of a wider tension between poetry and moral consequence. Admittedly, in both Gower's departure from Venus' court for his books of moral virtue and Chaucer's Retraction, an audience would have encountered a sense of these larger problems emerging in the characterisation of the authorial figure. Nonetheless, this sense would have remained subsidiary to the space for play which constitutes most of the *Confessio* and the *Tales* themselves, and the

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also Mooney et al., *Parlement of Foules* (DIMEV 5373), <<https://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=5373>> [accessed 21 April 2021]; Mooney et al., *Troilus and Criseyde* (DIMEV 5248), <<https://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=5248>> [accessed 21 April 2021]; and Mooney et al., Extracts from *Troilus and Criseyde* (DIMEV 5249), <<https://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=5249>> [accessed 21 April 2021].

<sup>6</sup> See Derek Pearsall, 'The Manuscripts and Illustrations of Gower's Works', in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. by Siân Echard (Cambridge: Brewer, 2004), pp. 73-97; see also Mooney et al., *Confessio amantis* A-Text (DIMEV 4226), <<https://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=4226>> [accessed 21 April 2021]; Mooney et al., *Confessio amantis* B-Text (DIMEV 4227), <<https://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=4227>> [accessed 21 April 2021]; Mooney et al., *Confessio amantis* C-Text (DIMEV 4228), <<https://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=4228>> [accessed 21 April 2021]; Mooney et al., *Confessio amantis* fragments (4229), <<https://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=4229>>, 19<sup>th</sup> March 2021; and Mooney et al., 'In Praise of Peace' (DIMEV 4100), <<https://www.dimev.net/record.php?recID=4100>> [accessed 21 April 2021].



questions regarding narrative and moral consequence which are raised when these works are read in the light of *dits amoureux* and *pastoralia* would not necessarily have been prominent.

This centralisation of attention on the *Confessio* and the *Tales* coincided with a greater comfort with the poetic as a stance from which a writer might interact with the moral demands of contemporary society in the English poets of the generation after Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe. This can be seen if we look at the two most prominent literary promoters of Chaucer and Gower's work in the following generation, Thomas Hoccleve (d. 1426) and John Lydgate (d. c. 1450). Thomas Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes* stands in an advisory position to match Chaucer's religious translations, Gower's moral poetry, or Clanvowe's *Two Ways*, in its offer of traditional direct guidance to the historical figure of Henry, Prince of Wales. This undertaking is set in a frame narrative in which Hoccleve's *persona* converses with an old man and asks for advice on securing the payment of his annuity from the King, but no aspect of this arrangement suspends moral consequence. From the very start of the work, Hoccleve reflects on the state of the society around him in concrete terms, as part of a world set in the real conditions of morality:

Me fil to mynde how that nat longe agoo  
Fortunes strook doun thraste estat rial  
Into mescheef.<sup>7</sup>

He nonetheless sets his *persona* out as that of a poet, writing in response to other poets. The old man recognises and names Hoccleve, and quickly sets him in connection with Chaucer:

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas Hoccleve, *The Regiment of Princes*, ed. by Charles Blyth (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999), ll. 22-24.

“Hoccleve, fadir myn, men clepen me.”  
 “Hoccleve, sone?” “Ywis, fadir, that same.”  
 “Sone, I have herd or this men speke of thee;  
 Thow were aqweyntid with Chaucer, pardee.”<sup>8</sup>

Hoccleve's *persona* subsequently laments the passing of Chaucer and Gower as great precedents who would have been able to shape the English language into a form worthy of presentation to the Prince. However, the way in which he presents his treatise stands in contrast to any composition by Chaucer or Gower. He sets out a poetic undertaking which also pertains to matters of substantial moral consequence, in dialogue with contemporary political events. Chaucer and Gower both composed works which combined moral instruction with a poetic narrative, most notably the Tale of Melibee and the mirror for princes in Book VII of the *Confessio*. However, both of these works take place within a fiction, which is itself placed within a narrative frame, and are thereby set in a highly equivocal relationship with the world outside the text. Hoccleve instead makes it clear that every element of the *Regiment of Princes* happens on the same level. His *persona*'s conversation with the old man occurs in a waking state and leads into his treatise, which is presented in the same state, and the whole work is closed in that state. He does not differentiate the position of his *persona* through his ageing, or a process of spiritual reform at any point. The same condition prevails in his *Series*, in which his *persona* articulates a concern to the visiting figure of the friend about the reception of his previous poetic works, along with the prospect of reception for the poetic and religious material he is presently compiling to produce the *Series* itself, in an interchange which constitutes the linking material for that same compilation. The narrative in which his *persona* discusses his poetry, the reception of his poetry, and the matters of religious weight which he addresses in its course, all occur in a version of the same social world in which the poetry is composed and will be received.

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<sup>8</sup> Hoccleve, *Regiment*, ll. 1864-67.

In a distinct but complementary fashion, John Lydgate frames his long poetic projects, the *Troy Book* and the *Fall of Princes*, with prologues which carefully obviate the operation of the narrative frame observed by Chaucer and Gower. In the Prologue to the *Fall of Princes* Lydgate sets Chaucer foremost among England's poets, with a catalogue of his works which flattens the distinction which Chaucer himself drew between religious translations and poetic work. Chaucer:

Notabli dede his bisynesse,  
Bi gret auys his wittis to dispose,  
To translate the Romaunce off the Rose.

Thus in vertu he sette al his entent,  
Idilnesse and vicis for to fle;  
Off Foulis also he wrot the Parlement [...] <sup>9</sup>

While Lydgate lauds Chaucer for fleeing idleness and vice, his use of this *topos* to introduce the *Parliament of Fowls* directly contradicts Chaucer's own depiction of his *persona* as willing to engage with idleness and with the *Roman de la Rose* in the *Parliament*, as set against his opposition to idleness in the prologue of to his life of St Cecilia, addressed in Chapter Three of this thesis. Lydgate levels out Chaucer's work; everything he undertook is presented as the accomplishment of the 'cheeff poete off Breteyne', no matter its medium.<sup>10</sup> To a significant degree, Lydgate centralises poetry as Chaucer's occupation, at the expense of his religious translations, and makes it respectable as he does so; any moral complexity around it is quietly set aside. In his prologue to the *Troy Book*, Lydgate outlines the moral value which poetry can directly instil, including the evasion of idleness, for his dedicatee, Prince Henry. It is to fulfil his inclination

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<sup>9</sup> John Lydgate, *Fall of Princes*, ed. by Henry Bergen, 4 vols (Washington D. C.: Carnegie Institution, 1923-27), I (1923), 306-11.

<sup>10</sup> Lydgate, *Fall*, I (1923), 246.

To rede in bokys of antiquite,  
 To fyn only, vertu for to swe  
 Be example of hem, and also for eschewe  
 The cursyd vice of slouthe and ydelnesse.<sup>11</sup>

Chaucer's poetry has become just as worthy a recourse as his devotional writing. In both his prologues to the *Troy Book* and the *Fall of Princes*, Lydgate addresses a royal dedicatee, Prince Henry and Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, respectively, who he claims requested the work from him, outlines the good it may bring them, and clearly refers to the sources which he is reworking. This is a stark departure from the narrative frame of the *dit amoureux* tradition, with its implication of the poet's *persona* in the narrative and its attention to distortion; Lydgate sets out the work which he is to perform as the poet, along with the good it can bring, and proceeds to accomplish it from outside its course. In the *Siege of Thebes*, Lydgate presents a prologue which ostensibly stands in contrast to this, as it sees him join the company of Chaucer's pilgrims on their return from Canterbury and be invited by the Host to 'Gynne some tale / of myrth or of gladnesse, | And noddē not / with thyn heuy bekke!'.<sup>12</sup> However, his tale of the siege of Thebes is punctuated with expositions of the poetic fables as commonly found in school commentaries, in his case largely drawn from Boccaccio. For instance, his relatively Chaucerian abbreviation of concrete events in the narrative, 'But how the wallys / weren on heghte reised, | It is wonder / and merveil forto here', is met with the gloss that Amphion's use of Mercury's harp is to be expounded as his

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<sup>11</sup> John Lydgate, *Troy Book*, ed. by Henry Bergen, 4 vols, Early English Text Society, Extra Series 97, 103, 106, and 126 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1906-35), I (1906), 80-83.

<sup>12</sup> John Lydgate, *Siege of Thebes*, ed. by Axel Erdmann, 2 vols, Early English Text Society Extra Series 108 and 125 (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, and Trübner, 1911-30), I (1911), 168-69.

employment of the gift of rhetoric.<sup>13</sup> The final conclusion of the work, the pragmatic advice that the violent outcome of war cannot be foreseen, is granted the theological explication of how:

Lucyfer, fader of Envie,  
The olde Serpent /, he levyathan,  
Was the first / that' euer werrë gan.<sup>14</sup>

Where the *dit amoureux* tradition sought to sustain poetic narrative by taking it up as a study in distortion, thereby avoiding the prospect that poetry could be deciphered into philosophy and found to have no good in its art, Lydgate is willing to undertake that process of decipherment on occasion, to demonstrate that his Chaucerian poetry is aligned with moral virtue. He employs it selectively, indicating that a moral justification for poetry is available, without conceding that this is the primary appeal of his poetry. This has the result that poetry subtly returns to its position as an addendum to philosophy, without any clear inherent good delivered by its own art of figuration. However, this movement is not openly declared. Instead, poetry quietly continues, with its position open to justification on demand, but with a tacit acknowledgement that it delivers a pleasure beyond the bare moral grounds of this justification.

It has become a critical truism that a repressive change took place in English culture in the 1410s which closed the world in which Chaucer and Gower worked, along with Langland, the *Pearl*-poet, and the Wycliffites. This position has been largely shaped by Nicholas Watson's seminal study of the effect of Archbishop Thomas Arundel's legislation against heresy on vernacular theology, which itself builds on a chronology outlined by Anne Hudson.<sup>15</sup> While it has been usefully recontextualised,

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<sup>13</sup> Lydgate, *Siege*, I (1911), 193-94.

<sup>14</sup> Lydgate, *Siege*, I (1911), 4662-64.

<sup>15</sup> See Nicholas Watson, 'Censorship and Cultural Change in Late-Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, the Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel's Constitutions of

qualified, and challenged by other critics and historians since, it remains central to the examination of cultural life in early fifteenth-century England, at least as a prominent point of contention.<sup>16</sup> Regardless of how this change might have taken place in relation to religious writing more broadly, the period sees the relationship between the role of the poet and religious writing become more comfortable and secure. Hoccleve and Lydgate are able to situate poetic play in direct contact with moral consequence in a way which Chaucer and Gower avoided even in the *Tales* and the *Confessio*, and to be celebrated for that work. Where critics have concentrated on a nervousness around the use of the vernacular in the fifteenth century, Hoccleve and Lydgate's ability to do this evinces a growing sense of security in the poetic sphere; a sense that the case for poetry as a medium does not need to be made anymore. This process accompanies a willingness to see the poet as a figure who can attend to a broad range of activity; the capacity for the poet to be a religious writer does not decline. Lydgate's *Testament* looks back on the sins of his youth from his old age but, as Sebastian Sobocki has ably observed, it employs his poetic and devotional modes to do so without implicating either of those in his past worldliness – it celebrates the breadth of his poetic work.<sup>17</sup> To

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1409', *Speculum*, 70. 4 (1995), 822-64, and Anne Hudson, *The Premature Reformation: Wycliffite Texts and Lollard History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988).

<sup>16</sup> Prominent reassessments include Vincent Gillespie, 'Vernacular Theology', in *Oxford Twenty-First Century Approaches to Literature: Middle English*, ed. by Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 401-20; Vincent Gillespie, 'Chichele's Church: Vernacular Theology in England after Thomas Arundel', in *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh, *Medieval Church Studies*, 21 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 3-42; Michael G. Sargent, '“Censorship or Cultural Change? Reformation and Renaissance in the Spirituality of Late Medieval England”, in *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh, *Medieval Church Studies*, 21 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 55-72; Ian Johnson, 'Vernacular Theology/Theological Vernacular: A Game of Two Halves?', in *After Arundel: Religious Writing in Fifteenth-Century England*, ed. by Vincent Gillespie and Kantik Ghosh, *Medieval Church Studies*, 21 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), pp. 73-88; and James Simpson, *The Oxford English Literary History vol. 2. 1350-1547: Reform and Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 322-557.

<sup>17</sup> See Sebastian Sobocki, 'Lydgate's Kneeling Retraction: The *Testament* as a Literary Palinode', *Chaucer Review*, 49. 3 (2015), 265-93.

press Sobecki's argument further, this position can be understood to be assertively non-Chaucerian, or at least only Chaucerian in the sense that it resembles the Chaucer who emerges in Lydgate's catalogue of Chaucer's works in the prologue to the *Fall of Princes*. It brings modes of writing together into the stable vocation of the poet where Chaucer kept them apart and persistently problematised the prospect that poetry could ever unequivocally support moral instruction. Similarly, Hoccleve looks back on a youth of misconduct in the *Male regle* on terms which resemble the ageing and repentance often employed to create a narrative frame, but the terms on which he does so are profoundly ambiguous, as his observation of his moral waste coincides with the squandering of money it entailed, and then leads to a request for further patronage. In comparison to Chaucer or Gower, he is comfortable as a repentant poet, and certainly does not suggest that his poetry should be confined to a youth spent in sin.

Prominent work by David Lawton and Robert Meyer-Lee has suggested that the growing stability and prestige afforded to poets by the early fifteenth century coincided with their complicity in political repression.<sup>18</sup> This can be seen with particular clarity in one new element of Hoccleve and Lydgate's poetic stance. As they articulate their role as poets on more stable terms – terms which allow their poetry to address matters of moral consequence directly – they take particular care to align themselves with the prosecution of heresy. Gower had previously condemned the Wycliffite movement in his moral work, as part of a broader commentary on the condition of society. Hoccleve and Lydgate, however, do so in asserting their particular role in society as poets, where that role does not otherwise bear the responsibility of large-scale social correction taken on by Gower. Early in the conversation between Hoccleve's *persona* and the old man in

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<sup>18</sup> See David Lawton, 'Dullness and the Fifteenth Century', *ELH*, 54. 4 (1987), 761-99; Robert J. Meyer-Lee, *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); this position is placed in a sophisticated dialogue with Chaucer's work in David Wallace, *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

the prologue to the *Regiment of Princes*, the old man questions Hoccleve on his religious orthodoxy, concerned that undue religious considerations could be the source of his sorrows, asking “‘Sone, if God wole, thow art noon of tho | That wrappid been in this dampnacioun?’”<sup>19</sup> Hoccleve’s *persona* replies in a credal statement:

“Of our feith wole I nat despute at al,  
 But at word, I in the sacrament  
 Of the auter fully byleeve and shal,  
 With Goddes help, whil lyf is to me lent,  
 And in despit of the feendes talent,  
 In alle othir articles of the feith  
 Byleeve as fer as that Holy Writ seith.”<sup>20</sup>

This stanza is highly reminiscent of *pastoralia* in one of its foundational forms: it is schematic and runs on a foundation of assent to authority in the light of the demands of the world’s condition. Following his briefly stated reply ‘Of our feith wole I nat despute at al’, Hoccleve turns to the form of the Creed – ‘I [...] fully byleeve’ – first treating the doctrinal matter in question in the old man’s account of the execution of John Badby, then resolving this into belief ‘In alle othir articles of the feith’, the standard doctrinal division of the Creed. This credal statement echoes Chaucer’s work in his religious translations and in the Parson’s Tale, and Gower’s moral poetry, but it is radically resituated to be a component of a poetic voice derived from the *dits amoureux* tradition – to be part of the poetic *persona* on the same plane as that *persona*’s composition of poetry. This position is retrospectively imputed to Chaucer, as recognised in Sebastian Langdell’s compelling recent account of Hoccleve’s reconstruction of the morally ambiguous figure of Chaucer the poet into a religious authority.<sup>21</sup> The same condition prevails in Hoccleve’s *Series*, in which the compilation of his work occurs in dialogue

<sup>19</sup> Hoccleve, *Regiment*, ll. 372-73.

<sup>20</sup> Hoccleve, *Regiment*, ll. 379-85.

<sup>21</sup> See Sebastian J. Langdell, *Thomas Hoccleve: Religious Reform, Transnational Poetics, and the Invention of Chaucer* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018).



with the figure of the friend, who reviews, critiques, and polices it, starting with attention to his earlier *Letter of Cupid* in the Dialogue, a translation of Christine de Pizan's *Épistre au dieu d'amours*, but moving from that poetic work to his translation of the *ars moriendi* from Henry Suso's *Horologium sapientiae* and two stories from the *Gesta romanorum*, the Tale of Jereslaus' Wife and the Tale of Jonathas, to the first of which the friend insists he add the allegorical moralisation, an insistence with which he complies and follows in the Tale of Jonathas. Even as he explores the composition of fiction, Hoccleve foregrounds his activity as a poet with moral responsibility in the light of credal deviance, and the consequent need for self-examination and reproach – on terms which were only parodically adopted by Chaucer in his depiction of his heresy trial before the God of Love in the prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*.

A similar principle emerges from Lydgate's prologues. In the prologue to the *Fall of Princes*, Lydgate aligns his work with the good intentions of Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester, as a man attuned to moral virtue in literature and a champion of the kingdom's prosecution of heresy:

Thus is he bothe manli and eek wis,  
 Chose off God to been his owyn knyht,  
 And off o thyng he hath a synguler pris,  
 That heretik dar noon come in his siht,  
 In Cristis feith he stant so hool vpriht,  
 Off hooli chirche deffence and champioun,  
 To chastise alle that do therto tresoun.

And to do plesaunce to our lord Iesu,  
 He studieth euere to haue intelligence;  
 Reedyng off bookis bryngith in vertu,  
 Vices excludyng, slouthe and necligence,  
 Makith a prynce to haue experience,  
 To knowe hymself, in many sundri wise,  
 Wher he trespasith his errour to chastise.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Lydgate, *Fall*, I (1923), 407-20.

Humphrey is alert to error in those around him and potentially in himself, and his reading of books like this one, which Lydgate dedicates to him, and the works of Chaucer, which Lydgate catalogues in the same prologue, helps him to maintain this vigilance twice over: by the virtues they instil and by the recreation which their reading provides as a respite from Humphrey's active life. Poetry cultivates and sustains the prince's *synguler pris*, his particular gift for the prosecution of the Church's enemies. Far from the *dits amoureux* tradition, poetry is now an instrument for the maintenance of virtue in public life, in a more direct way than Gower was able to pursue in the moral poetry of his *Mirour* or *Vox*; where those treatises could rebuke sin and reveal the errors of society with an invitation for emendation to their audience, Lydgate provides poetry directly to a virtuous ruler, with the claim that it will fuel his virtuous action. Unlike Gower, Lydgate does not need to bolster his moral poetry against a form of distorting, immoral poetry, as even the fiction which he provides is presented as nourishment for his society's moral arbiters.

Given this departure, which is reflected back to reshape an understanding of Chaucer and Gower's work, the condition of Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe as writers who attend to an unresolvable tension between the role of the poet in the *dit amoureux* tradition and their investment in *pastoralia* is a condition that was limited to their own lifetime. In a sense this is most clearly visible in an examination of Clanvowe, who did not live to attend to the pressure of reconciling his two surviving works, the poetic *Book of Cupid* and the pastoral *Two Ways*, leaving an unstable corpus. One text which he composed came to be attributed to Chaucer, and the other fell out of circulation entirely, not least on the grounds that possession of it could have been dangerous. A recent thread in criticism of Chaucer's poetry emphasises the relationship between his interest in a contingent, secular poetic perspective and the prospect of eternity which that adumbrates; in contrasting, but complementary studies, Megan Murton and Marion

Turner have drawn attention to a Chaucer whose attention to the provisional in the world is always on the cusp of prayer, even outside his religious works, and a Chaucer who is primarily attentive to a world of change and motion in contrast to the totalising attention to eternity enshrined in the society around him.<sup>23</sup> While both Murton and Turner's work is attentive, even framing this duality can actually simplify the precarious place which Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe's work occupied in their own lifetime, between attention to a secular perspective which facilitates the fictions of poetry and the eternal perspective demanded by the prospect of the Last Judgement. These three writers are profoundly invested in both at once and are constantly negotiating the difficulty of that position. The result is that their poetry comes with a particular nimbleness: a tendency to move between modes of attention and to articulate the relationship between them, or to refuse to do so. This coincides with their remarkable historical situation. Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe were all laymen composing poetry, in contrast to the tendency of western European society at the time. Even in their work in the *dit amoureux* tradition they stand against the generation of Machaut, a lay canon, and Froissart, a lay clerk who later became a beneficed priest. Only the knight Granson matches the status of Clanvowe, with Chaucer and Gower unique as squires. In working with *pastoralia* as well as *dits amoureux*, Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe do not have contemporary peers on the continent. The religious writing of Chaucer, Gower, and Clanvowe was not as sophisticated as the inventive devotional work which critics tend to foreground when they discuss a culture of repression emerging in the early fifteenth

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<sup>23</sup> See Megan E. Murton, *Chaucer's Prayers: Writing Christian and Pagan Devotion*, *Chaucer Studies*, 47 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2020), and Marion Turner, *Chaucer: A European Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), in particular pp. 3-9. It is worth noting that, for all of their difference in emphasis, Turner grounds her discussion of Chaucer's secularity on an earlier version of Murton's work – see Turner, *Chaucer*, p. 8. n. 26.

century, but it indicates a range of unstable possibility and inventiveness available to their generation.

Alastair Minnis has suggested that the formal academic sophistication of vernacular literature in fifteenth-century England was restricted in comparison to developments in modern-day Italy, Spain, and France, and has associated this with a suspicion of intellectual activity in the vernacular which accompanied the repression of heresy in England.<sup>24</sup> However, in a certain respect the repression of the energy of Chaucer and Gower's generation appears to come with an increasing formalisation of vernacular poetry, and a growth in its prestige – often in conjunction with its support for the repression of heresy. The versatility and invention of Chaucer and Gower's negotiation between perspectives was marginalised in the same process which constituted their literary success. To a considerable degree, this continues to be the case. The discipline of literary criticism has become much readier to attend to religious literature in the last few decades, if not always to grant it the prominence it is due. Nonetheless, criticism remains indebted to a set of assumptions which places Chaucer and Gower at the root of a tradition of poetry which is not confined to being primarily religious, in contrast to many of their contemporaries, even as it admits that they did not inhabit a secular society and did not have exclusively secular horizons. This tendency can be seen in two of the most accomplished recent studies of late medieval English poetry. Ryan McDermott's study of tropology as a poetic mode, primarily in *Piers Plowman*, is based on a division between devotional poetics and a Chaucerian tradition

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<sup>24</sup> This case is made in Alastair J. Minnis, *Magister amoris: The Roman de la rose and Vernacular Hermeneutics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 313-19, as a 'premature Renaissance', and revisited in Alastair J. Minnis, 'Standardizing Lay Culture: Secularity in French and English Literature of the Fourteenth Century', in *The Beginnings of Standardization: Language and Culture in Fourteenth-Century England*, ed. by Ursula Schaefer (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 2006), pp. 43-60, and Alastair J. Minnis, 'Inglorious Glosses?', in *John Gower in England and Iberia: Manuscripts, Influences, Reception*, ed. by Ana Sáez-Hidalgo and R. F. Yeager, Publications of the John Gower Society, 10 (Cambridge: Brewer, 2014), pp. 51-76.

of lauration, while Daniel Sawyer investigates the degree to which the verse medium of religious writing like the *Prick of Conscience* and *Speculum vitae* was understood to be the same as that of work in the ‘Chaucer tradition.’<sup>25</sup> In both studies this vitally helps to centre a set of neglected and misunderstood poetic practices while keeping them in relation to the Chaucerian mainstream of scholarly attention, but this does have the effect of reinforcing the illusion that a secure, broadly secular, and eventually modern poetic tradition stems from the work of Chaucer and Gower. These assumptions are not strictly modern: the appropriation of Chaucer and Gower as the origin point for this literary tradition and the establishment of a stable social role for the poet as a figure who could attend to religious demands, but was free to pursue other matters and retain his moral and social prestige, were forces which emerged in the fifteenth century, and in the work of a lay clerk and a monk. It is worth attending with caution even to the late medieval record. Chaucer and Gower’s work was shaped by the particular circumstances of their own generation, such as the coterie nature of the poetic production, the disjunction between it and the clerical offices which poets tended to hold, and their own unusual status as educated laymen. Very soon after their death, their poetry was subject to pressures which reformed it, and these were often the same pressures which preserved it, and led it to find a significant audience.<sup>26</sup> Attending to

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<sup>25</sup> See Ryan McDermott, *Tropologies: Ethics and Invention in England, c. 1350-1600* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2016), and Daniel Sawyer, *Reading English Verse in Manuscript, c. 1350-c. 1500* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020). For the complexity and resilience of the Chaucer tradition’s rhetorical claims, see the outline in Ralph Hanna, *Pursuing History: Middle English Manuscripts and their Texts* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), pp. 1-17, along with the attempt to suggest that it is parvenu tradition to late fourteenth-century London undertaken in Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300-1380* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

<sup>26</sup> See Seth Lerer, *Chaucer and his Readers: Imagining the Author in Late-Medieval England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), and A. C. Spearing, *Medieval to Renaissance in English Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). For the vitality of fantasy which accompanies this Chaucerian tradition in poetry, see Thomas A. Prendergast, *Chaucer’s Dead Body: From Corpse to Corpus* (London: Routledge, 2004).

what we can know of those circumstances can help make the work of Chaucer and Gower less readily amenable to our own critical taxonomy, and more inventive in its articulation of its own historical moment.

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