

FILARDO-LLAMAS, Laura, Brian GASTLE & Marta GUTIÉRREZ RODRÍGUEZ eds.; Ana SÁEZ-HIDALGO ass. ed. 2012: *Gower in Context(s). Scribal, Linguistic, Literary and Socio-historical Readings*. (Special issue *ES. Revista de Filología Inglesa* 33.1). Valladolid, Publicaciones de la Universidad de Valladolid. pp. 189. ISBN: 84-844-8725-3.



THE ESSAYS IN THIS SPECIAL ISSUE OF *ES. REVISTA DE Filología Inglesa* were presented at the Second International Congress of the International John Gower Society held 18–21 July 2011 in Valladolid and entitled “John Gower in Iberia: Six Hundred Years.” The guest editors, Laura Filardo-Llamas, Brian Gastle, and Marta Gutiérrez Rodríguez, briefly describe in their introduction, “Gower in Context(s): Scribal, Linguistic, Literary and Socio-Historical Readings,” the idea of context around which they organize the issue and then divide it into three sections: “Manuscript Context,” “Socio-Historical Context,” and “Literary and Historical Context.” This collection, by an international assembly of prominent scholars, is required reading for anyone interested in Gower studies.

Ruen-chuan Ma, in the first essay in the “Manuscript Context” section, “Vernacular *Accessus*: Text and Gloss in Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* and Christine de Pizan’s *Épître Othéa*,” (17–28), argues that Gower and Christine de Pizan base their literary practice in the *Confessio Amantis* and the *Épître Othéa* on the acceptance of Latin as the established literary language from which their native tongues must acquire, through investigation of the classical language’s authority, the necessary credentials to become themselves established as vehicles for serious thought and literature. Both authors employ elements of medieval academic prologues, *accessus ad auctores*, to achieve related but different goals. Gower’s “representation of Latinity as a labored course of learning serves as an *accessus* for the language itself, a derivation of cultural authority that Gower aspires to replicate in the vernacular” (17), theorizing “the vernacular’s

potential as a literary language to identify the interpretive skills that it still needs to acquire” and clarifying “the skills and knowledge that can be transferred from Latin” (18). Christine, however, “uses the vernacular to create an alternative, but no less effective, *accessus* form” (17–18), illustrating by her practice the fulfillment of such an acquisition and exemplifying “the types of vernacular literature that such transference makes possible” (18).

Ma selects *CA* IV.2633–74 to illustrate his point about Gower’s use of Latin authority. The passage occurs as part of Genius’ instruction of Amans in labor as the antidote to sloth, the main subject of Book IV, and consists in an account of Latin’s growth from its first letters, fashioned by a certain Carmente, to the structuring of its “ferste reule of scole” by Aristarchus, Donat, and Dindimus, the emergence of “Rethorike” through Tullius and Cithero, Jerome’s translation of the bible, and Ovid’s poetic advice to lovers. Ma proposes this passage as Gower’s valorization of “Latin’s ability to articulate eloquence, sacred truth, and wise counsel,” which “exemplifies Latin as a literary language worthy of respect and emulation.” Gower “represents the vast tradition of Latin learning through its versatility and interpretive skills in order to target his exemplum at Amans and at the English vernacular reading public” (20), thereby creating a “poetics of learning” that “theorizes the vernacular treatment of the narratives, morals, and concepts that has its origin in Latin learning” (21). Gower’s mention of Carmentis in the Latin head verse at the beginning of the prologue “reveals that the course of Latin literary history occupies a fundamental place not only in reenactment of Latinity as an exemplary cultural authority, but also in the essential design of his multilingual work” (21) and so “symbolizes the transfer of learning from Latin into English, which Gower sees his *Confessio* as facilitating” (22).

In Ma’s view, Christine’s *Épître Othéa* responds to Gower’s theorizing by illustrating “the forms of vernacular writing that learning Latin makes possible [...] Christine’s work dispenses with

the Latinate trappings of the *Confessio's* apparatus and instead incorporates Latin citations into the French text so that the two languages and the types of writing that they embody are in direct contact" (23). Because each of the classical narratives Christine includes is followed by prose gloss and allegorical interpretation, indicating the respective values of scholastic and biblical analysis, she can be said to specify the "distinct literary capacities—philosophical commentary and allegorical exegesis among them—that the vernacular acquires through its engagement with Latin learning" (23). As Gower used the Latin head verses to suggest his approach, so Christine uses her prefaces to announce her intention to spur others to similar enterprises. As Gower uses Genius for his spokesperson, so Christine creates the fictional goddess Othéa, although with the crucial difference that Gower's choice suggests both the expansion and limitation of vernacular literary capacities and Christine's re-mythicizes classical narrative and adapts it to the needs of the vernacular.

Tamara Pérez-Fernández, in her essay "The Margins in the Iberian Manuscripts of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*: Language, Authority and Readership" (29–44), discusses the differing presentations of the English and Iberian manuscripts of the *Confessio Amantis*, in particular the translation of Gower's Latin head verses into the vernaculars and the elimination of his marginal glosses. The result is a change in what she terms the "textual dynamics" of the poem. For her, the appearance of Gower's text is important evidence of his expectations because, she believes, he may have participated in its preparation. Whether or not he supervised scribes, he played a role in the development of his manuscripts and likely provided the layout in its commonly-encountered two columns of text, forty-six lines per column, Latin apparatus in the margins or the text column, and two miniatures. Latin text is offered apart from the poem's body, some placed in the margins in red ink or a different script in the tradition of literary glossing, some inserted in the text column with marginal remarks and glosses. Individual

manuscripts testify to the wide range of scribal divergences from the common arrangement and to the inclusion of a wide range of glosses. Apparently the Portuguese and Spanish translators moved the authorial Latin glosses into the text itself; thus in the Iberian manuscripts, only occasional scribal glosses survive.

Pérez-Fernández acknowledges that assessing Gower's role in the presentation of the *Confessio* is a complex task. He is the author and compiler of the text, its commentator via the Latin verses and glosses, and *scriptor* by his role in its arrangement. The movement of the apparatus of annotation into the vernacular in the Iberian translations erases the boundary Gower erected between Latin and English, "thus threatening the carefully designed layers of textual interaction" (35) and altering the nature of Gower's presence. The Spanish and Portuguese translators, having completely blurred the existing line of demarcation, are forced to find other ways "to remind the reader that the commentary in question is in another narrative frame" (35) and resort for the most part to imitating the *littera glossularis* as reduced summary, with the result that the authority of the Latin original is lost, the authorial presence is diminished, and exemplification as an aspect of the *Confessio* is de-emphasized. Some of Gower's Latin apparatus is moved into the index/table of contents of the Iberian manuscripts, further obscuring the author's multiple roles and even his name by taking it from a much more prominent position in the Prologue's marginalia. Pérez-Fernández points out that Gower's role as author and commentator is diminished by the disappearance of bilingualism, whereas his role as compiler of exemplary tales suitable for the upper classes is reinforced. The structure and internal order proposed by Gower become more difficult to appreciate and the tradition of Boethian commentary, apparently so important to him, simply disappears in "the de facto naturalization of Gower's *Confessio* into its new Iberian context" (42).

In "Gower's *Confessio* and the *Nova Statuta Angliae*: Royal Lessons in English Law" (45–65), Rosemarie McGerr contends

that Gower's royal instruction of Richard II and Henry IV in the *Confessio Amantis* bears comparison to the *Nova Statuta Angliae*, an ongoing compilation of statute law from the reign of Edward II that opens with an account of Edward II's deposition and the pardon of all who participated. Such comparison, she remarks, "illuminates each text's hybrid quality, revealing how each interweaves discourses from legal, religious, and literary genres, as well as 'mirror for princes,' that create new frames of reference for its readers and present strong arguments for the king's responsibility to uphold England's laws" (46). McGerr believes that both texts, probably commissioned for Richard, share common concerns with a group of works from the early 1390s "that offered Richard II advice on good kingship" (47). These circulated in reading circles—nobility, land-holding gentry, educated professionals and administrators—interested in good governance. McGerr's edition of the *Nova Statuta* is the core text in Cambridge, St. John's College, MS A.7, a collection of Latin and French statutes from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries compiled around 1390. The manuscript prefaces the *Nova Statuta* with three of the *Vetera Statuta*, or *Old Statutes*—*Magna Carta*, the *Articuli super Cartas* of 1300/1, and the *Ordinances of 1311*—that focus on limitations on royal power and suggest that the collection provided Richard "the opportunity to contemplate the legal ramifications of earlier episodes of crown-magnate conflict as he confronted his own" (48).

The narrative that opens the *New Statutes* "constructs the removal of Edward II from the throne as both legal and divinely sanctioned in order to save England from tyranny and restore justice to the realm" and shows "affinities with the genres of chronicle, religious exemplum, mirror for princes, and chivalric romance" (49). By following evil counselors in allowing the Despencers to return from exile to which they had been justly and legally sentenced, Edward II falls from divine grace and estranges himself from his son, who, by following good counsel, restores just government and ascends the throne as Edward III. McGerr proposes that, "the

opening narrative becomes a miniature mirror for princes that also serves as a lens through which the record of statutes that follows can be read" (49). It offers "Richard II an explicit lesson on the English king's responsibility to uphold the Statutes of the Realm, a lesson that countered Richard's sympathetic view of Edward II" (49–50). The narrative "weaves together literary, religious, and legal discourses" (52) to present evidence and arguments that Edward betrayed his coronation oath, the same sworn twice by Richard II (1377 and again 1388 in the settlement with the Lords Appellant), and so lost God's favor.

Gower, McGerr asserts, by his legal training and status as wealthy landowner, was certainly familiar with the *New Statutes* text and shares its opening narrative's interest in the themes of good government, which he likewise explores in Genius' account of Aristotle's advice to Alexander in Book VII of the *Confessio*. Just as the coronation oath includes promises to keep and employ the law, Book VII argues that "a king who does not take care to uphold England's just laws has violated his oath and lost his right to rule" (55). McGerr's reading of Genius' counsel shows that the king's responsibility to ensure the well-being of the land and the stability of his own reign by the maintenance of royal justice is central to Gower's concern and mirrors the similar content of the opening narrative of the *New Statutes*. The version of Book VIII that Gower adapted after the Lancastrian accession underscores this link by repeating Book VII's argument that "the good king first justifies himself according to God's law and then is able to govern his kingdom according to the oath or 'charge' he swore at his coronation" (58). In both the Ricardian and Lancastrian versions, however, the *Confessio* borrows from several genres of medieval literature and "weaves these discourses together in such a way as to suggest a unity of courtly, legal, and religious ideals that the poem offers as a new kind of advice to princes" (59). Reading Gower and the *New Statutes* narrative together shows "the capacity of fourteenth-century English writers to interweave discourses so

as to create multiple frames of reference for their readers, offer new perspectives, and transform older genres" (59).

The first essay in the volume's second major section, "Socio-Historical Context," is Jerome Mandel's "Conflict Resolution in *The Wife of Bath's Tale* and in Gower's 'Tale of Florent'" (69–79). In their related tales of the young knight sent in search of the answer to an age-old question, Chaucer and Gower resort to different methods of what we today call conflict resolution. Chaucer emphasizes interaction and negotiation between contending parties as they strive to be reasonable when authority does not work, and Gower indicates resolution within his main character by recourse to authority and principle in a manner designed to be instructive of proper conduct. Put another way, Gower "defines character in terms of an individual's thinking and commitment to the principles which ultimately define 'the good' and direct his behavior accordingly" (69) and Chaucer "reveals character in terms of discussion, negotiation, compromise—the contingencies of business rather than the demands of absolutes" (69–70). The object of both methods is to persuade, not to collapse contending positions to a mutually-acceptable middle ground. The difference, Mandel suggests, is that Gower's approach reflects the workings of medieval institutions and Chaucer's the actual workings of human beings within their less formal social contexts. Gower's method is designed to instruct, Chaucer's to entertain.

The response of the respective communities to Florent's violent act is to approach the royal court, bypassing or ignoring lay or ecclesiastical options. The appeal to the king is immediately undermined in Chaucer when the queen intervenes and negotiates with her husband for authority to resolve the case, which she receives. In Gower, however, the grandmother appears with the idea of a quest, which is accepted without negotiation. When Chaucer's knight cannot answer the queen's question, the two negotiate (he with his sighs and groans) a grant of additional time. In Gower the grandmother lays down the terms and the knight

rides forth. When Chaucer's knight encounters the loathly lady, they strike a deal. Gower's knight offers whatever the hag wants and then withdraws into the recesses of his mind to scheme a solution. Chaucer highlights with wry amusement the contractual wedding night negotiations of the newlyweds; Gower shows us the grim fulfillment of an arrangement that turns out well because of adherence to principle. Chaucer "foregrounds appeals to political, social, religious, and ethical authority, all of which are questioned, discussed, and negotiated [...] Gower's world is more solid, more fixed, more dominated by principle than by negotiation" (77).

In "Controlling the Uncontrollable: Love and Fortune in Book I of the *Confessio Amantis*" (81–96), Misty Schieberle "explores the connections between the views of Love and Fortune in the *Confessio Amantis* and in works by Guillaume de Machaut" (81): the *Jugement dou Roi de Behaingne*, the *Remède de Fortune*, and the *Confort d'Ami*. Machaut's challenge to Boethian ideas about Fortune and his alternative interpretation that Fortune is not "an uncontrollable capricious force but rather the consequence of a lover's immoral choices" (83) is extended by Gower to political and ethical concerns. For Schieberle, the "political discourse of the *Confessio* and the courtly framework of Book I" is bridged by the Latin head verse to the Prologue "to signal that the notion of Fortune ties the political and amorous content of the work together" (82). Gower's "representation of the ties between love and Fortune demonstrates his close engagement with and careful response to Machaut's ideas, in opposition to prevalent Boethian concepts of Fortune" (82).

The jilted lover of the *Jugement* represents a beginning point for recognizing how to deal with Fortune's instability in matters of the heart, Schieberle contends. Accepting responsibility for his wretched lot, he lacks a larger vision and simply resolves to suffer. The lover of the *Remède* has the advantage of Esperance's guidance and learns that having placed himself willingly on Fortune's wheel his strategy must be to remove himself and practice virtues, which will bring him amorous fulfillment. The *Confort d'Ami*, a

commentary on Charles of Navarre's imprisonment, "constructs Charles not as the victim of political intrigue (or political mistakes) but rather of erotic desire" that puts him in Fortune's power, from which the poet "seeks to enable the king to regain control upon his escape" (85). By implying that the practice of virtues in love is applicable to political concerns, "Machaut begins to suggest the perspective that Gower adopts in the *Confessio Amantis*, in which the notions of controlling political fortunes and controlling fortunes in love become intertwined" (85).

Gower emphasizes personal responsibility in love and politics and shows how men's decisions create the world. "By addressing the virtues Amans needs to control his fortunes in love, Gower simultaneously provides lessons in virtuous behavior that will allow man to control his Fortune more broadly and respond to the needs articulated in the Prologue for men to live virtuously and improve the state of the realm" (86). Schieberle references tales from Book I of the *Confessio* to illustrate her point: "Acteon" for its protagonist's "misloking," "Medusa" for Perseus' self-control, and "Albinus and Rosemund" for Helmege's lack of control. In "Florent," "Nebuchadnezzar," and "The Three Questions," characters who submit to virtuous behavior resolve troubles and restore stability to their respective worlds. Florent does this by accepting an obedient role and Nebuchadnezzar by his transformation into a submissive beast. Both Pedro and Alphonse choose humility in "The Three Questions" and so share in mutually beneficial conclusions. Returning to the Prologue and the concluding framework of Book VIII, Schieberle connects her discussion of the tales from Book I to the issue of Fortune and love, concluding that "the *Confessio* extends Machaut's ideas about rejecting Fortune in favor of practicing virtues in order to address simultaneously both amorous and political ventures." Gower "provides a worldly motivation that should drive his reader to embrace the counsel in the *Confessio*: the fantasy of controlling the uncontrollable" (95).

In the following essay, Katie Peebles, “Arguing from Foreign Grounds: John Gower’s Leveraging of Spain in English Politics” (97–113), questions why Gower employs a Spanish setting for the *Confessio*’s “Tale of the Three Questions.” She concludes that he intends to contribute to a debate about the nature of England’s participation in Spanish affairs: “In particular, the choice of setting could have been inspired by Lancastrian interventions on the Iberian Peninsula and recurrent parliamentary discontent about funding these expeditions” (97) in the period 1385–1387, when Gower may have begun the *Confessio*. The content of the tale is consistent with the poet’s intent “to support the potential for good government, first by offering advice to the young king Richard II, and subsequently by supporting the promise he saw in John of Gaunt’s family. In this political context, even the act of keeping the setting of the ‘Tale of the Three Questions’ in Spain could be read as an argument for the relevance of Spain to England and for the relevance of poetic counsel in domestic politics” (98).

Peebles points out Gower presents Spain to his reader as recognizable, a participant in a familiar court culture, not the wild locale of elsewhere in the *Confessio*. The names and the idea of Spanish dynastic marriage echo for English history. Henry II and Eleanor of Aquitaine married their daughter Leonor to Alfonso VIII of Castile in 1170. Their great-granddaughter Eleanor, sister of Alfonso X of Castile, married Edward I in 1254, stabilizing the English position in Gascony and allying England and Castile, and was great-great-grandmother to both Richard II and Henry IV. John of Gaunt married Constanza, daughter of Pedro I of Leon and Castile, and wed their daughter Catalina to the future Enrique III in 1388 at the conclusion of his efforts to enforce a claim to the Spanish throne. That ended English military activities in Spain and made possible restoration of profitable relations based upon the exchange of goods and pilgrimage travel to Compostela. Gaunt’s costly military expeditions to Spain were the subject of contentious parliamentary discussions complaining about wasted resources, lost

revenues, and energy diverted from France and the Low Countries. Parliament's resistance is recorded in various sources, among them the *Westminster* and *St Albans Chronicles*, which testify to domestic frustration with Gaunt's Spanish adventures and the improvement of his public image upon their cessation.

Gower's "Tale of the Three Questions" is thus relevant to the national discussion about Spain in the middle 1380s. Its "performance of good counsel is ultimately directed to everyone participating in the world of Parliament and the court" and it offers "pointed advice [...] that members of a court should avoid direct challenge or pacifying acquiescence in favor of calming voices expressing an insistent logic that the king can accept" (110). When Peronelle solves the king's riddles and poses her own, she employs a strategy relevant "to the endemically tense relationship among Richard, the magnates, especially his former regents and Gaunt, and Parliament" (110). Peebles argues that Gower's story "offers a way to reframe the Spanish political situation and domestic politics in a way that suggests a more acceptable set of choices: intermarriage, alliance, and realignment instead of the absolutism of either conquest or avoidance," and the Spanish setting "reframes the political argument over Lancastrian Castilian engagements and models a role for counsel in domestic concerns" (110).

The essay beginning the third large section, "Literary and Linguistic Context," is Linda Barney Burke's "'The Voice of One Crying': John Gower, Christine de Pizan, and the Tradition of Elijah the Prophet" (117–135). Burke claims that Christine de Pizan in her *Lamentacion sur les maux de la France* and John Gower in his *Vox Clamantis/Cronica Tripertita* shared self-definition as *vores clamantium* in the tradition of John the Baptist and his Old Testament prototypes Elijah and Elisha. "It was in their self-appointed role as moral teacher, especially to the powerful, that each poet assumed the mantel of a biblical prophet, specifically the 'voice of one crying'" (120). That mantel descends upon them through a fiery biblical tradition presenting the prophet as the

angry voice of social and religious conscience, eager to confront the powerful with the truth about their actions and quick to threaten impending regime change as the consequence, even to encourage it as well as warfare in general if conducted by their choice for king.

Both poets modify the tradition, however. In the *Lamentacion*, Christine presents herself as “a poor voice crying in this kingdom,” “a little woman all by myself,” which Burke identifies as “her elegantly feminized version of [...] a male prophet standing apart as ‘vox clamantis in deserto’” (125), a function she is permitted as a woman otherwise denied the role of preacher. Christine sides with the simple farmers and city dwellers against the nobility who condemn them to the horrors of civil strife to serve their own ends, but “the endorsement of violence by Elijah and Elisha has no echo whatsoever in her *Lamentacion*” (127). She expunges all traces of the Jezebel figure and features virtuous queens who function as peacemakers. Despite her appeals on behalf of the downtrodden, she “remained on good terms with patrons on both sides of the French civil wars” and her pleas to the queen “were most likely aimed at ratifying the queen’s already long-term efforts at diplomacy, rather than speaking unpopular truth to power” (129). On the other hand, “Gower identified strongly with ‘the voice of one crying,’ albeit in his own strategic and selective fashion” (123). He draws on visionary prophets frequently, but only in his French and Latin works does he give “notable place” to Elijah and Elisha. His “self-construction as a prophet may be coded” (124) in the famous archer illustration found in several manuscripts of the *Vox Clamantis*, showing the poet standing in a stylized wilderness to launch his missives. He flees to the forest in the *Vox’s Visio Anglie* to lament the times. As does Christine, he pleads for widows and the poor and against the injustice of kings and judges at various places in the *Vox* and the *Mirour*. He evidences the same sort of “religious certitude leading to persecution of dissenters” so prominent in the Elijah tradition, rejecting Wycliffe as a rank heretic and praising Bishop Arundel, proponent of burning heretics. The *Cronica Tripertita*

is comfortable with “the deposition and fatal mistreatment” of Richard II and also with “the indiscriminate slaughter of the king’s supporters” (127). Gower uses sparingly the misogyny central to the Elijah tradition, referencing only Alice Perrers at one point in the *Mirour*, for the reputation of gentle Queen Anne did not allow her to be turned into Jezebel. Gower’s use of the Elijah tradition “was quite strategic and selective” and working within it he “was a speaker of only limited truth to power, being careful to phrase his political satire in the safe generalities allowed by the conventions of the *de regimine principum* tradition” (129). His different strategy in the *Confessio* yielded different results.

According to Annika Farber in the essay following, “Genius and the Practice of Ethical Reading” (137–153), Genius’ narrative strategy is determined by Gower’s decision to use “ethical reading” in the *Confessio Amantis*—that is, he reframes secular texts rather than appropriating them and makes them morally available to new readers. Ethical reading (the term is Farber’s) was developed in medieval schools “as a way of justifying the use of imaginative literature in the classroom” by challenging readers “to view this literature as a source of practical wisdom, even if that wisdom is not always apparent on the surface of the text” (139). Farber finds evidence of her category in the teachings of Basil and in a type of medieval *accessus ad auctores* that poses the question *cui parti philosophiae supponitur?* (to which part of philosophy does it belong?), the most common response to which was *ethicae supponitur* (it belongs to ethics) (141). Ethical reading of such diverse texts as Ovid’s *Heroides* and Lucan’s *Bellum Civile/Pharsalia* makes them “serve an exemplary function, teaching their readers about the intricacies of practical ethics” (144). Pseudo-Bernardus’ commentary on the *Aeneid* provides both ethical and allegorical interpretations when it discusses, under the heading *cur agat* (what should it do? what is the *utilitas* or *causa finalis?*), the “knowledge of how to act properly, acquired from the exhortation imparted to us by the examples” (145). The *Aeneid* in Pseudo-Bernardus’ view is “a

collection of exemplary tales, according to which particular sections of the text can be pulled out and assigned relevant Christian virtues” (146), after which the deeper level of allegorical significance can be probed. Ethical reading and allegorical interpretation are equally valid.

To illustrate the advantage of reading ethically, Farber offers the tale of “Phebus and Daphne” in Book III as an example of rash behavior, and “Ceyx and Alcyone” in Book IV as an instance of both sloth and the utility of dreams. Genius’ strategy in “Phebus and Daphne” simplifies the source “to make it more useful as an exemplum on the vice of ‘folhaste’ and related topics” (148). He aligns “Ceyx and Alcyone” to teach “that sloth and love are incompatible” and at the same time to speak “to the larger issues of the text” (149), reflecting backward to the *Confessio*’s initial establishment as a dream vision and forward to Book VIII. In both cases he responds to Gower’s concern, expressed in the poem’s beginning, that the purpose of old books was to teach moral content, which truth imparts to present writers an imperative to attempt the same. “What the *Confessio* portrays is that same process of reading and learning that readers are expected to experience” (151).

In “Cracks and Fissures: Gower’s Poetics on the Edge” (155–170), Malte Urban addresses the wide range of reader responses to the presence of extreme violence in many of Gower’s tales. Gower “uses all levels of his texts, from content to multi-linguality and manuscript layout, for his location of his poetry on the edge between acceptable and unacceptable behavior” (158). The result is that “there is not just one moral message in Gower’s poetry, but rather several, often competing, messages,” often located “on the very edge of what is permissible,” allowing Gower “by frequently striving to at least indirectly rationalize and explain otherwise morally dubious behavior [to] outline his own moral stance(s)” (158).

Urban reads a selection of texts to illustrate Gower’s variety of “edginess,” beginning with the *Vox Clamantis*, which, modeling its

speaker on John of Patmos and his apocalyptic stance, “situates his speaker on the edge between past and present, good and wrong, righteous and sinful” (159). Gower’s use of English and Latin in the *Confessio*, a poem that proclaims it will go a middle way, likewise situates it “on the edge between Latin and English, as well as between competing moral messages,” themselves the product of a dialogue that locates “ethics and morals on the edge between Amans and Genius” in “a space that is constantly teetering [...] between past, present and future” (161). Gower’s life in Southwark, where he views the Rising and famously meets king Richard, is also “edgy” given its nature as a borderland beyond the city where circumscribed activities became possible. Urban reads “The Tale of the Trojan Horse” and “The Tale of Florent” in illustration of edginess in the *Confessio*. The first is located at the wall of a city which has become the edge between competing societies and illustrates the catastrophic consequences of the removal of that wall in order to accommodate an outside element. The second is perched “on the edge of what is acceptable human behavior” and highlights “the cracks and fissures on the edges of the chivalric code” (168), whose contradictory pressures require reconciliation in Florent and his conduct.

In the volume’s final essay, “Rewriting Difference: ‘Saracens’ in John Gower and Juan de Cuenca” (171–189), Emily Houlik-Ritchey asks, “Why does Gower’s *Confessio* contain Saracens and Juan de Cuenca’s Castilian translation does not? Gower mentions Saracens in some half-dozen tales, but the wicked “Soudaness” of Book II’s “Tale of Constance” is his main representative of a category that indicates ambivalence about the world of Islam and its relationship with Christianity. The semantic range of the word “Saracen,” Houlik-Ritchey notes, “is so varied that no particular reference is stable, even when texts describe (or over-describe) the ‘Saracen’ as nefarious, evil, or misguided” (175). The Sultan’s mother is the incarnation of evil, but Houlik-Ritchey points out that her violence and deception are directed against her own son and people

because she fears to lose her high estate and not her faith. She murders Muslims and Christians alike at the wedding feast, except for Constance, who is sent to sea with a five-year supply of food. The Sultana does not care where her son's intended bride ends up but simply desires to get her out of Barbarie. "These details speak to a genuine desire on the Souldaness' part not to harm Constance directly, and they complicate Gower's portrait" (177). When the heroine is rescued by the Romans, however, the emperor launches a violent Roman expansion against Barbarie, supposedly justified by the Sultana's wickedness.

The Spaniard Cuenca's narrative, however, although it follows Gower's in most details, does not employ the term "Saracen" at any point and characterizes the Sultana simply as "la mala vieja" ("the evil old woman"), declining to "describe the soldán's mother in terminology that plays upon the military, cultural, and religious tensions between Christians and non-Christians" (178) or "mark her as an enemy against which a fantasized Christian wholeness (embodied in Constance and Rome) can be consolidated" (179). She is merely a villainess, unlinked to religion and culture. When religious difference must be noted, Cuenca employs "infeles" ("infidels") to mark the distinction, a word that doesn't imply the same sort of narrative. For Gower's audience, "Saracen" evokes the realm of fantasy, of an aggressor against which violence is always permissible because it is always necessary" (183). Cuenca's text, "in contrast, does not routinely characterize his Christian protagonists' neighbors in terms that invoke religious conflict" (183).

What different value accrues, then, to Cuenca's text? Houlik-Ritchey suggests that the two versions of the tale reflect the different experience of paganism and otherness in England and Spain. The peaceful conversion of Northumberland and the bloody conquest of Bervería find an alternative vision in Spain, the other place in the tale where Gower locates and employs the Saracens suppressed in Cuenca. Houlik-Ritchey suggests this would be Spain before the Islamic conquest and a place of *convivencia*, living

together, that the Spanish translator wishes to promote. Read in such a way, the two versions of the tale reveal “that placing English and Iberian texts side by side makes legible medieval texts’ deep and fraught engagement with ethical questions of difference and representation—urgent questions with which we wrestle just as desperately today” (188).

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