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# Civility and Gower's "Visio Anglie"

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John Gower was obsessed with food and wine, at least in his account of the English Rising of 1381. While late medieval chroniclers, such as Thomas Walsingham and Henry Knighton, outlined significant events that constituted the English uprisings in May through June of 1381, curiously, Gower's rendition of the rebellion, which focuses exclusively on the final days in London, says little about actual events, such as the pursuit of men associated with the poll tax, the persecution of London lawyers, or the storming of prisons, topics of seemingly greater import than the rebels' dietary interests.[1] Instead, Gower disproportionately emphasizes the insurgents' consumption of fine wines and delicate viands, and he repeatedly conjures protracted images of rebels' metamorphoses into sundry animals, not infrequently connecting such animal imagery to consumption. Why would the *Visio Anglie* discuss political events so parsimoniously while covering the rebels' dietary urges and bodily deformations so fully?

Gower's lack of support for the insurrection and his enthusiasm for the socioeconomic hierarchy in late medieval England are clear. As David Aers has remarked about the *Visio Anglie*, Gower "writes with moral outrage and an unselfreflexive [*sic*], violent hatred of those lower-class people whose actions are seen to be conflicting with the traditional ideal of the social order."[2] The *Visio* attempts to reproduce this order through both obvious and subtle means. The text's Good-versus-Evil binary and the insistence that God supports the ruling classes are heavy-handed. A more nuanced strategy, however, involves the *Visio*'s complicated nexus of

1.Compared to other chronicles, Jean Froissart's account of the rebellion demonstrates greater interest in the rebels' consumption of food and wine and in issues of civility.

2. David Aers, "Representations of the 'Third Estate': Social Conflict and Its Milieu Around 1381," *Southern Review* 16 (1983): 335--49 (345).

distinction and civility, a nexus commensurate with the instruction offered by courtesy manuals that circulated in late medieval England. Such manuals constructed elaborate systems of classification surrounding etiquette and assigned various degrees of authority to certain bodies in relation to others. Courtesy manuals fostered a version of what Pierre Bourdieu identifies as distinction at the bodily level, an elaborate semiotic system where bodies are stratified according to degrees of superiority and inferiority through corporal markings, markings that are, in turn, interpreted as indices of inner character and worth.[3] Deploying conventions from medieval courtesy manuals, the *Visio* assigned varied degrees of authority to Englishmen and women at the bodily level, a system of signification in which food, physical appearances, and overall comportment were key elements. Echoing courtesy manuals, the *Visio* constructed corporal marks of distinction, interpreted physical signifiers as indices of people's inner character and value, and classified bodies into social groups accordingly. Offering understandings of civility that began with codes of bodily conduct and that expanded to claims about the cosmos, the *Visio*'s corporal regulatory system promoted particular understandings of citizenship and governance that sought to protect the socioeconomic hierarchy in late fourteenth-century England. Further, according to the *Visio*, the insurgents in 1381 not only thwarted bodily classifications and threatened to liquidate the attendant systems of social stratification, but they

3. For discussions of bodily hexis, see Pierre Bourdieu, *Language & Symbolic Power*, ed. John B. Thompson and trans. Gino Raymond and Matthew Adamson (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991), 81--89, and "The Habitus and the Space of Life-Styles," *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984). For discussions of late medieval courtesy manuals in relation to Bourdieu (although not bodily hexis), see Claire Sponsler, *Drama and Resistance: Bodies, Goods, and Theatricality in Late Medieval England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), esp. chap. 3; Sponsler, "Eating Lessons: Lydgate's 'Dietary' and Consumer Conduct," in *Medieval Conduct*, ed. Kathleen Ashley and Robert L. A. Clark (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2001), 1--22; and Mark Addison Amos, "'For Manners Make Man': Bourdieu, de Certeau, and the Common Appropriation of Noble Manners in the *Book of Courtesy*," in *Medieval Conduct*, 23--48.

eroded more global differences that subtended civilization itself. Constituting a force of annihilation, Gower's rebels took up and occupied a queer position—not unlike that articulated by Lee Edelman[4]—that imperiled both health and futurity, ultimately demonstrating the need to further disenfranchise and control the non-ruling classes in the wake of the English Rising of 1381.

This article begins by outlining the linguistic terms in which the *Visio* discusses rebels versus their opponents, terms intertwined with discourses of civility in late medieval courtesy manuals. Gower scholars have said little about the *Visio* in relation to courtesy or civility, with two notable exceptions. Regarding courtesy, David R. Carlson notes that Gower's *Visio* imputes a subhuman status to the rebels, the "quotidian condition of agricultural labor in feudalism," a status recognized in contemporary English, as illustrated by this verse:

> Thin fadere was a bond man.
>
> Thin moder curtesye non can.
>
> Every beste that levyth now
>
> Is of more fredam than thow.[5]

While Carlson does not discuss this quotation further, he has paired the *Visio* with a verse that justifies the subjection of peasants because they have no knowledge of courtesy, a topic Carlson does not pursue. Regarding the *Visio* and civility, Helen Barr argues that, excluding Chaucer, medieval poets' and chroniclers' accounts of the insurrection "are written from an utterly

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4. Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

5. David R. Carlson, "Gower's Beast Allegories in the 1381 *Visio Anglie*," *Philological Quarterly* 87 (2008): 257--75 (262). This verse is from "A Song of Freedom" (1434) in *Historical Poems of the XIVth and XVth Centuries*, no. 22, ed. Rossell Hope Robbins (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959), 62. Carlson has altered Robbins's spelling and punctuation.

authoritative perspective, and seek to present the rebels in the worst possible light, and as far removed from any kind of civilized discourse as possible." Gower, Barr continues, "writes the rebels out of civilized discourse."[6] "Discourse" and "civility" in the *Visio* are much more expansive categories of control than Barr's use of these terms suggests an expansiveness to which Gower's terms for the opposing sides in the rising point. The insurrection was divided primarily along class lines, with defendants generally consisting of wealthy merchants, large land-owning monasteries, and aristocrats, including members of the gentry, while rebels emerged from a wide range of non-ruling ranks, including various strata of peasants, casual laborers, servants, apprentices, journeymen, prosperous shopkeepers, small-time traders, master craftsmen, and sundry types of artisans.[7] Gower renders the demographics of the opposing sides more metaphorically and binaristically, a binary operative as early as the opening line of the chapter summaries: "In huius opusculi principio intendit compositor describere qualiter seruiles rustici impetuose contra ingenuos et nobiles regni insurrexerunt" (In this work, the writer first intends to describe how servile peasants violently rebelled against freeborn/gentlemanly men and

6. Helen Barr, *Socioliterary Practice in Late Medieval England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 107, 109.

7. On the rebels' demographics, see Andrew Prescott, "London in the Peasants' Revolt: A Portrait Gallery," *London Journal* 7 (1981): 125--43; R. B. Dobson, "The Risings in York, Beverley, and Scarborough, 1380--81," in *The English Rising of 1381*, ed. R. H. Hilton and T. H. Aston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 112--42; and A. F. Butcher, "English Urban Society and the Revolt of 1381," in *English Rising of 1381*, 84-111. Rodney Hilton, *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381* (Methuen: London, 1977), 176--77, explains that though contemporary observers of the event do not clearly distinguish among components of the rebel company, some observers intermittently employ occupational descriptors, such as those "working in the mechanical trades" or represent rebels as part of the communities of various regions.

nobles of the kingdom).[8] A key point is that most of Gower's descriptors for his besieged colleagues align high rank with admirable, outstanding character and behavior. Targets are "nobilium" (l. 1269) and "de stirpe nobilitatis" (l. 1606), "nobilitas" denoting not only nobility of rank but also "distinction," "loftiness of character," and "superior quality."[9] Targets are "gentiles" (l. 480), which in Latin can denote "a fellow countryman" (*OLD* 760) and which in Middle English simultaneously signifies members of the nobility or gentry and those who are noble, generous, and kind or of refined or aristocratic tastes and who are courteous, polite, well-bred, charming, and graceful.[10] Perhaps the most recurrent descriptor is "ingenuus" (e.g., ll. 460, 696, 728, 858, 1260, 1291, 1296, 1603), indicating "native to a place," "freeborn," "gentlemanly," "honorable," "generous," and "refined" (*OLD* 906--7). Another frequent ascription for those among Gower's social strata is "ciuis" (e.g., ll. 460, 1140, 1163) or "citizen," "fellow countryman," and "freeman" (*OLD* 330). "Citizen" and "freeman" demarcated recognizable socioeconomic and political categories in late fourteenth-century England, with a

8. G. C. Macaulay, *Vox Clamantis* in *The Complete Works of John Gower: The Latin Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 3. All subsequent references to the *Vox* are to Macaulay's edition with line numbers appearing in parentheses. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are mine, informed by Eric W. Stockton's translation in *The Major Latin Works of John Gower* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962) and A. G. Rigg's translation of the *Visio Anglie* in *John Gower: Poems on Contemporary Events*, ed. David R. Carlson (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2011).

9. *Oxford Latin Dictionary* (*OLD*), ed. P. G. W. Glare (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 1183. Translations of specific Latin terms are from *OLD* and appear in parentheses (after "*OLD*") following translations of specific Latin terms.

10. *The Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Hans Kurath, Sherman M. Kuhn, and Robert E. Lewis (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001; repr., Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, Digital Library Production Services, 2001; quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med. Also, John Gillingham, "From Civilitas to Civility: Codes of Manners in Medieval and Early Modern England," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12 (2002): 267--89 (270)**,** points out that although in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries "gentilhommes" and "gentleman" primarily meant "men of gentle birth entitled to bear arms," these terms also implied a claim to a superior culture.

citizen or freeman enjoying a range of rights and responsibilities in a city, such as the ability to vote and to buy and sell within city limits and membership in a political and economic civic community.[11] More importantly, "ciuis," which again intertwines privileged socioeconomic positions with impressive behavior, is the root of "ciuilitas" or "civility" (*OLD* 329).[12]

The *Visio* frequently describes rebels as "serui" or "seruilis" (e.g., ll. 659, 693, 996, 1071, 1093, 1375, 2103) and "plebs" (e.g., ll. 171, 330, 705, 707, 712, 1011, 1128, 1133, 1321, 1957, 1974), terms that both demarcate a low socioeconomic position and indicate a social demeanor of baseness and commonness (*OLD* 1389, 1746, 1747--48). The most recurrent descriptor is "rustici" (e.g., ll. 494, 728, 841, 849, 858, 866, 870, 922, 991, 1068, 1133, 1138, 1174, 1192, 1254, 1263, 1291, 1750, 2096, 2099), denoting peasants; belonging to the country, rustic, and lacking the elegance or refinement of the town; crude, clumsy, and possessing a countryman's lack of refinement; uncouth in manner or lifestyle; and coarse, unpolished, and boorish (*OLD* 1671-72). The *Visio* repeatedly deploys "rusticitas" (e.g., ll. 174, 412, 658, 695, 843, 853, 907, 975, 2093, 2098, 2101), indicating country-born, rustic, uncouth, boorish, unsophisticated, intellectually narrow or provincial, and gauche; and signifying the lack of a townsman's *savoir-faire* (*OLD* 1671). Hence, the *Visio*'s descriptors for rebels align rank with a set of social behaviors and locations. As John Gillingham explains, "rusticus" and "rusticitas" are key words

11. Sylvia L. Thrupp, *The Merchant Class of Medieval London (1300-1500)* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1948), 2--3.

12. Although early modernists have conventionally viewed "civil" and "civility" as emergent sixteenth-century categories that displaced "courtesy" as key terms denoting approved conduct, Gillingham critiques this medieval-early modern divide, as does Sponsler, *Drama*, 51--53, 72. See also Terence Scully, *The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer Press, 1995), 174--79.

in late medieval courtesy literature, indicative of its claims to teach socially superior conduct.[13] Therefore, the *Visio*'s insistent and recurrent use of "rustici" and "rusticitas" forges a strong link between the poem and late medieval courtesy literature. Tellingly, when insurgents appear in the dream vision, the narrator's first comments center on their boorishness (ll.1 70--74), immediately foregrounding the rebels' uncouthness as a primary concern of the poem. As Barr notes, Gower's rebels are "beasts who inhabit woods and marshlands rather than the civility of the city."[14] The *Visio* renders the insurrection in part as a battle between rustici and the urbanus magnus, recalling Latin celebrations of the "urbs" as the locus of civilization and echoing classical contrasts between the civil and the barbaric, categories also operative in medieval courtesy manuals. Gower's rebels are the barbarians at the gates, threatening to destroy civilization, a metaphor made literal in the *Visio* by those forces pounding on the doors of the Tower of London, the seat of civility, forces seeking to massacre the Tower's noble inhabitants, imperiling England and all humankind.

The *Visio*'s portrayal of the insurrection mobilizes a standard repertoire of principles and maxims, especially surrounding dining, from courtesy guides that circulated in fourteenth-century England. The *Visio* draws on English manuals, such as the heavily reproduced early fourteenth-century *Stans Puer ad Mensam* and the late twelfth-century *Urbanus Magnus* by Daniel of Beccles, the latter of which, as Jonathan Nicholls explains, enjoyed considerable impact on subsequent English courtesy manuals.[15] The *Visio* is also inflected by medieval

13. Gillingham, 271.

14. Barr, 109.

15. Jonathan Nicholls, *The Matter of Courtesy: Medieval Courtesy Books and the Gawain-Poet* (Woodbridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 1985), 162--66. On the dating and circulation of *Stans Puer ad Mensam*, see Amos, "For Manners Make Man." While most other courtesy guides

English and European texts such as John of Salisbury's writings and Petrus Alphonsi's *Disciplina Clericalis* that offer limited considerations of courtesy. In addition, the *Visio* echoes a few classical texts, and their derivations, offering instruction in social behavior that overlaps with what later becomes identified as courtesy, most notably the *Disticha Catonis*.[16]

According to medieval courtesy manuals, the utmost evidence of civility is control of the body and its appetites, an ability to govern that demonstrates self-mastery,[17] with such mastery, in turn, intersecting with social control. Courtesy guides that circulated in medieval England, especially those composed in English, privilege the dining hall as one of the most pronounced sites of civility.[18] The late medieval English dining hall was an important locus at which the social hierarchy was reproduced, a space heavily regulated through the order in which guests were served, through the types and quantity of food guests of different ranks received, and through dictates regarding interactions among guests of disparate socioeconomic groups.[19] While the social order was visually rendered through the mise-en-scène of the seating arrangements, diners were instructed to feel indebted to heads of households for their generosity. Many dining

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in Frederick. J. Furnivall's compilation, *The Babees' Book: Medieval Manners for the Young: Done into Modern English from Dr. Furnivall's Texts*, ed. Edith Rickert (London: Chatto & Windus,1923) are conventionally dated post-*Visio*, this article's notes occasionally cite lines from these English, largely fifteenth-century texts because they reiterate well-worn medieval English maxims about courtesy, especially on dining.

16. On courtesy manuals and the *Disticha Catonis*, see Nicholls, 63--65.

17. Nicholls, 21. Mary Theresa Brentano, *Relationship of the Latin "Facetus" Literature to the Medieval English Courtesy Poems* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1935), 3; and Scully, 175, 180--83.

18. *Stans Puer* provides an example. Regarding dining in English versus Anglo-Norman manuals, see Gillingham, esp. 267--71.

19. Nicholls, 19; Brentano, 72--74; *Stans Puer*, 27; John Russell's *Book of Nurture*, in *Babees' Book*, 56, 69--75; *Urbanitatas*, in *Babees' Book*, 13; *The Book of Courtesy*, in *Babees' Book*, 98.

dictates revolved specifically around gluttony, partially because gluttony, including drinking wine greedily like Bacchus, as Daniel of Beccles cautions, indicates selfishness, a lack of control over one's base instincts, and an absence of moral sobriety.[20] Commonplace dictates regarding gluttony include admonitions against demonstrating unseemly eagerness for food and drinking in excess.[21] Daniel of Beccles, for example, warns against dining like a dog or seizing the best morsels from a plate placed in front of another person, a maneuver for which one could be condemned as a *rusticus*.[22] Being associated with peasants is a frequent threat that haunts courtesy manuals as a means of encouraging readers to police their own bodies and those of others.

The *Visio*'s indebtedness to courtesy manuals is evidenced by the inordinate amount of time Gower spends narrating the rebels' violations of conventional dining precepts. Gluttony is proposed as a primary motivation for the rebels' deeds, and the *Visio* specularizes the rebels' consumption of food and wine at length. While the twelfth- or thirteenth-century *Phagifacetus* of Reinerus Alemannus begins with the observation that because man differs from beasts he must partake of food in a manner befitting his superior nature,[23] the *Visio* offers recurrent images of

20. Daniel of Beccles, *Urbanus Magnus*, ed. J. Gilbart Smyly (Dublin: Hodges, 1939), 34 (l. 949), and more generally, 34--35 ( ll. 947--87). See also Nichols, 99--100; and Scully, 180--84.

21. Brentano, 93; *Stans Puer*, 27, 29; *Book of Courtesy*, 81; Daniel of Beccles, l. 944; and *Distichs* 12, *The Distichs of Cato: A Famous Medieval Textbook*, trans. Wayland Johnson Chase, University of Wisconsin Studies in the Social Sciences and History, ser. 7, no. 24 (1922), http://www.archive.org/stream/distichsofcatofa00chasrich/ distichsofcatofa00chasrich_djvu.txt.

22. See Daniel of Beccles, 37 (ll. 1037--38), and 46 (l.1397). The latter maxim replicates Petrus Alphonsi, *The "Disciplina Clericalis" of Petrus Alfonsi*, trans. and ed. Eberhard Hermes (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977), 115. See also *Stans Puer*, 28.

23. *Phagifacetus* of Reinerus Alemannus, cited in Brentano, 29.

voracious, animalistic insurgents: dogs are content neither with crumbs from their masters' tables nor with bones, but their jaws demand, and eat, better food (ll. 385--86); asses seek tastier food and drive horses from their homes and unjustly want the rights of horses (ll. 195--98); and the oxen no longer eat chaff or coarse straw but seek better grain (ll. 251--52). Similarly, the swine do not hunt for husks or acorns from the forest and are not content with dregs and water but plunder the better food they see and gulp down unfamiliar wines, after which, because of their rustic nature, they lay as if dead (ll. 359--66). The sort of speciation the *Visio* undertakes when discussing the rebels, as indicated by the particularity of these types of beasts, could be viewed as a taxonomic imperative orchestrated by Gower, a literary display of imposing an order on the rebels, an enactment of disciplinary power. The literary is offered here as an efficient method for turning rebellion from incoherency into meaningful nonsense. In the narrative, eventually Bacchus drowns the rebels' eyes and wits in wine so that their limbs move but they cannot advance their feet (ll. 949--52). Because the dining hall was an important site in late medieval England in which social bonds were forged and displays of power were enacted, the rebels' autonomous, unimpeded consumption of food and wine in the dream vision comprises a key locus at which Gower laments the unravelling of an alleged social contract.

Many medievalists have traditionally understood courtesy manuals to be structured by the premises that knowledge of how to control one's body and demeanor attests to the ability to control one's will and that good etiquette is the signifier of good morality and ethics.[24] As Bourdieu argues, dining habits are not mere habits but are routinely interpreted as indices of the

24. Examples include W. O. Evans, "'Cortaysye' in Middle English," *Mediaeval Studies* 29 (1967): 143--57; Brentano, 3, 9--13; Scully, 180--84; and Nicholls, 1, 8--9, 22--44. As Gillingham, 280, points out, John of Salisbury employs "civil" to refer to aesthetic criteria surrounding taste, moral standards of self-restraint, and political values of good lordship.

inner essence and moral virtue of a person, a testimony of character.[25] In keeping with understandings of courtesy as a barometer of spiritual well-being, the *Visio*'s insistence on rebels' gluttony and on their emphatic breaches of more general dining etiquette is offered as evidence of their spiritual and ethical bankruptcy, rendered vividly in the image of the goose and cock who transform into a raven and kite and who are no longer content with any food except human bodies (ll. 527--35). A structuring logic in the *Visio* is that those whose habits are slovenly, discourteous, or downright vicious—those who demonstrate weak self-restraint—possess an imperiled soul, impoverished morality, and poor ethical standards and hence are incapable of ruling themselves and need governance. By contrast, those who demonstrate self-restraint and the attendant courtesy are declared to be on the side of God and the Good and are marked as committed to the prosperity of others and of the general community. These courteous beings are therefore pronounced appropriate and capable participants in England's governance—or at least as worthy of being in close proximity to those who rule.

This capacity for self-rule, as well as the ability to govern others, is manifest at the level of what Bourdieu calls the "bodily hexis," roughly, the internalized way in which a body moves, speaks, occupies space and otherwise signifies its socioeconomic position.[26]A key function of medieval courtesy manuals was to instruct readers in the mechanics of privileged bodily hexes so that these behaviors would endow their bodies with markings of superiority beyond the populace. Offering explicit instruction on how to properly handle such items as food and wine, communal dishes, utensils, and shared goblets and on how to negotiate posture, nose-wiping, and, in the case of Daniel of Beccles's *Urbanus Magnus*, even the purgation of gas and urine in the banquet

25. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 192--93.

26. See note 3.

hall, courtesy manuals instruct readers in elaborately scripted orchestrations of bodily gestures and manners. These regulations were ideally internalized at a young age,[27] although, as Stephanie Trigg argues, conduct manuals offered multiple addresses to various medieval readerships.[28] These guides cultivate a physical presence considered deserving of respect and admiration—or, at the very least, provide the ability to recognize such a presence in higher ranks. The regulations teach readers, those who had the leisure to consume such books and the means to do so, distinction. This extensive instruction in "bodily hexis" (including gestures, manners, movements, and dining habits) endows the affluent with the illusion of natural physical elegance and grace. This illusion provides the bearer with a claim to possess an inherent disposition naturally suited to be among the ruling classes. Such physical performances confer prestige on the bearer and act as a testimony of inner gentility and as a guarantee of a nature superior to those among the multitude.

The *Visio*'s insistence that rebels do not know how to consume food appropriately is, in part, an argument that they lack a bodily hexis indicative of a superior nature. The *Visio*'s repeated claims that rebels voraciously consume food and wine imply that they have neither been schooled in the propriety of eating at a moderate pace nor possess the inherent ability to recognize the merits of doing so. Conjuring the specter of intoxicated rebels sprawled in London streets, Gower complains that these pigs seize and plunder what they think is best, that neither water nor dregs from wine caskets supplied their drink but that they gulped down fine wines. As a result, Gower laments: "Rustica natura, dum fert incognita vina, / Mortuus vt truncus ebrietate

27. As Nicholls, 73, points out, by the beginning of the fourteenth century, Latin courtesy manuals were an established part of the school curriculum in England. See also 16, 63, 67, 69.

28. Stephanie Trigg, "Learning to Live," in *Middle English*, ed. Paul Strohm (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 459--75.

iacet" (Rustic nature, while bearing unfamiliar wines, lies like a corpse disfigured by drunkenness) (ll. 365--66). Evidently, insurgents lack both the gentility of judgment to know what constitutes moderate quantities of wine and the gentility of appetite for their bodies to be able to digest fine wines, their inebriated stupors resulting simultaneously from overconsumption and from country constitutions, unaccustomed and ill-suited to such fare. Moreover, the rebels' tendencies to gulp down elegant wines, to greedily devour food, and to lie in drunken disarray in public streets indicate that their modus operandi differs dramatically from those of the higher classes, whose courtesy manuals caution them from a young age against over-indulgence in wine and whose bodies would not typically find fine wines markedly foreign.[29] Distinction in relation to food operates in the *Visio* in other ways as well. When classifying Englishmen into canine categories, Gower demarcates clearly between unschooled curs and dogs not allied with them. Curs do not hunt, delight in the sounding of the horn, nor run through groves to chase hare or deer. Rather, they bark at men's ankles and cause trouble (ll. 387--94). Apparently, unlike noble dogs, these common mongrels possess poor discernment, an impairment that manifests itself in the methods by which they consume food in the quantities they devour and in their preferred leisure activities.

Given the logic surrounding distinction and bodies, it makes sense, for several reasons, that Gower's rebels metamorphose into animals. In the first one-third of the dream vision, when the rebels transform into various beasts, the text repeatedly stages their inability to issue much more than unintelligible noises. According to the courtesy manuals, a crucial component of courteous speech is continence, which includes the abilities to discern appropriate spaces for

29. Also, David R. Carlson, *John Gower: Poetry and Propaganda in Fourteenth-Century England* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2012), chap. 9 indicates, Richard II and Henry IV employed wine in systems of reward for service, including Gower's poetic service to the Lancastrian cause.

one's words and to delineate suitable topics of conversation.[30] A courteous disposition is expected, as are appropriate levels of deference or command, adherence to which—and thereby to the socioeconomic hierarchy—is understood to generate productive civil speech.[31] To facilitate such speech, courtesy literature frequently emphasizes the importance of policing affect, with particular attention to anger.[32] By contrast, Gower's insurgents spew uncontrolled, anti-social utterances that are affronts to the dictates of etiquette surrounding proper speech and to the social order that proper speech promotes. By the logic of courtesy manuals, rebels' illegible speech results, in part, from their abdication of reason through wrath, an abdication symbolized by insurgents' animalistic forms, since reason was conventionally perceived to be an important demarcation separating men from beasts. Gower renders wrath endemic to rebels' modus operandi, articulated in the following terms: "furo" and "furor" (e.g., ll. 503, 895, 910, 964, 1000, 1128, 1133, 1191, 1195, 1210, 1259, 1263, 1273, 1305, 1318); "ira" (e.g., ll. 1189, 1193, 1265); and *rabies* (e.g., ll. 501, 617, 747, 777, 892, 893, 927, 1183, 1389). Demonstrating little ability to reason, throughout their sacking of London, Gower's rebels are propelled by affect. Gower's rebels are incapable of articulating any political agenda and their motivations for insurgency are incoherent, the product of a nonsensical force or drive.

In her study of early modern discourses of civility, Cathy Shrank argues that sixteenth-century English writers recurrently linked disorderly, disobedient, or deviant behavior with

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30. One of *Stans Puer*'s themes is the importance of self-restraint and moderation in speech. Gillingham, 276--77, nicely summarizes advice from Daniel of Beccles on verbal restraint. See also *Book of Nurture*, 49; *Urbanitatis*, 15; and *The ABC of Aristotle* in *Babees' Book*. 10.

31. See Brentano, 96; Daniel of Beccles, 49 (ll. 1414--15); *Book of Courtesy*, 89; *Urbanitatis*, 13; and Russell's *Book of Nurture*, 63.

32. Gillingham, 275--77, outlines Daniel of Beccles's advice. On anger, see also Brentano, 96. *Distichs of Cato*, 23, 25; and *ABC*, 11.

incomprehensible or redundant speech, an intersection inherited from Cicero, who forges a constellation among language, reason, and civil living. Shrank explains that Cicero's *De Inventione*, employed as a standard textbook in sixteenth-century England, describes the origins of civilized societies and attributes their development entirely to language's influence. Cicero believes that "through reason and eloquence" men are "transformed from wild savages into a kind and gentle folk."[33] Cicero was also important in fourteenth-century English educations in rhetoric, and in several poems Gower draws on the figure of Cicero and on his writings, as the scholarship of Ann W. Astell and Kurt Olsson indicates.[34] The *Visio*'s perception of an uncontrollable populace issuing predominantly unintelligible noises replicates Cicero's logic, whereby disorderly speech is emblematic of disorderly conduct, a lack of civility, and poor rational capacities. Strikingly, Cicero's claim about the origins of civilized societies implies that to lose one's aptitude for eloquence is to devolve into a lower form of being. Such devolution happens to Gower's rebels who, with their shedding of linguistic skills and their metamorphoses into animals, regress to a state before the reign of civility. Uttering irrational speech and sporting beastly bodies, rebels are marked as men lodged in previous stages of human development, stuck in the mode of savages not yet evolved into kind and gentle subjects. Although wrath is part of the catalyst for the rebels' transformation into animals according to the *Visio* these demographics are inherently predisposed to unintelligible speech and to the barbarism such speech signifies, a disposition latent in the terms "rustici" and "rusticitas," meanings evident in their respective

33. Quoted in Cathy Shrank, "Civil Tongues: Language, Law and Reformation," *Early Modern Civil Discourses*, ed. Jennifer Richards (Houndsmills, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 19--34 (19).

34. Ann W. Astell, *Political Allegory in Late Medieval England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), esp. chap. 3, and Kurt Olsson, "The Cardinal Virtues and the Structure of John Gower's *Speculum Meditantis*," *The Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7 (1977): 113--48.

antonyms derived from the root "urbs" (city): "urbanus," "urbane," and "urbanitas," terms that align city dwellers with the style of the city, namely, politeness, elegance, sophistication, wit, cleverness, sophistication, and polished and refined elegance, refinement of style, and rhetorical prowess (*OLD* 2105). Strikingly, as Nicholls points out, "urbanitatis" was a commonplace generic title for medieval courtesy books.[35] Grounded in "urbs," these terms reinforce a classical city/country divide in which the city represents the height of civilization, while "rustici" are condemned as the inverse. The *Visio*'s recurrent description of rebels as "rustici" and as possessing "rusticitas" and its emphatic insistence on the incomprehensibility of the sounds issuing from the rebels depict these men and women as inherently possessing impoverished rhetorical skills. The text thereby mounts in yet another way the argument, through a further logic borrowed from and continuous with courtesy manuals, that these ranks are intellectually inadequate and are therefore insufficiently equipped to govern themselves. A common premise in the manuals is that the ability to control one's tongue attests to the ability to control one's will and verifies that reason is firmly in command. Those who show such self-restraint are deemed owners of fit, orderly intellects, and equipped to participate in England's governance, or, at least, compatible with those who rule.[36] Those who show such verbal restraint are also deemed attentive to the interests of the larger body politic. By contrast, someone whose speech is impetuous or discourteous demonstrates a lack of self-command, a disorderly mind, an inability to rule him or herself, and hence a decided need for oversight and containment. In contradistinction to the angry mob, stands the Archbishop of Canterbury, whose death is one of

35. Nicholls, 70.

36. For example, on "fair-mindedness," see Nicholls, 79-80. Brentano explains, "Courtesy is exterior conduct proportional and motivated by reason" (13). *The Babees' Book or A Little Report of How Young People Should Behave* advises to "keep your tongue from jangling, for so indeed shall ye deserve a name for gentleness and good governance" (8).

the few specific events narrated in the *Visio*. The archbishop meets his death calmly, patiently, and quietly (ll. 1051--52, 1095--100), attesting to his true nobility of mind and character and hence to his propriety for his pontifical post.

Instead of demonstrating self-restraint, Gower's rebels are propelled largely by uncontrollable affect and seemingly instinctual forces. Their impulses to fulfill such bodily needs as sleeping and eating are either oblivious or antagonistic to the dictates of etiquette. The lengthy litany of rebels transforming into various beasts issuing sundry inhuman noises occurs in a tediously repetitious manner, as if the rebels are subject to an endlessly repetitious drive, one that erupts throughout the countryside, once the usual forces of social repression have been overthrown. Such unharnessed impulses imperil social relations and even civilization itself, through a cultural logic not unlike that explained by Edelman. As in Edelman's alignment of antisocial forces with abjection, disease, and death, the *Visio* associates the insurgents' unbridled drives and impulses with illness and morbidity. Rebels' alignment with filth and disease position them as antithetical both to the health and viability of the social body and to life itself.

Dirt, disease, and damage to the social body form an intermittent nexus that appears in courtesy guides. Cleanliness is a pronounced bodily mark of distinction fostered by medieval courtesy manuals, and medieval courtesy guides frequently offer advice surrounding hygiene. Much dining instruction relates to sanitary matters, such as an insistence on clean garments at the dining table and on elaborate, visible displays of pre-dinner hand washing to demonstrate good hygiene, a cleansing ritual ideally undertaken by diners in order of rank.[37] A few texts emphasize hand washing after meals, including Petrus Alphonsi's *Disciplina Clericalis*, which warns about the importance of post-consumption hand washing, for the sake of sound manners and good

37. Brentano, 68--71; Scully, 178; Nichols, 91; *The Little Children's Little Book*, 20; and *Book of Courtesy*, 95, 111--13, 114--15.

personal hygiene; many people, Alphonsi cautions, have contracted eye diseases because they wiped their eyes with unwashed hands after eating.[38] Courtesy manuals routinely admonish potential diners to keep the table linen clean, and spectacles of cleanliness at the shared table attest to an individual's good personal hygiene and commitment to the physical well-being of the larger community.[39] Courtesy manuals also promote proper hygiene and cleanliness more generally, frequently offering instruction on bathing and grooming and on the importance of clean garments.[40] As Nicholls's study of these manuals indicates, understandings of courtesy in medieval England often interpreted physical cleanliness as indicative of moral and spiritual cleanliness and health.[41] An important method of distinguishing oneself as an aristocrat or wealthy merchant and of distancing oneself from the taint of manual labor was through cleanliness, more readily available to the affluent through leisure and through the services of others that wealth afforded. Accordingly, as George B. Stow explains, Richard II and his court were heavily associated with personal hygiene and cleanliness. Stow notes that the monarch's remodelling of the royal palace at Sheen between 1384 and 1388 reflects Richard's keen interest in personal hygiene and cleanliness. These renovations incorporated 2,000 painted tiles for the king's bath, large bronze taps for hot and cold water, and personal latrines in all rooms.[42] Stow

38. Petrus Alphonsi, *Disciplina Clericalis*, 150. See also Brentano, 71.

39. Brentano, 68-69; *The Babees' Book or A Little Report*, 6--7; *Urbanitatis*, 13-14; *The Little Children's Little Book*, 20; *Book of Courtesy*, 82--84; and Nicholls, 35.

40. Brentano, 101. See also the end of Daniel of Beccles's treatise.

41. Nicholls, 8--9, 29--30. See also chap. 6.

42. George B. Stow, "Richard II and the Invention of the Pocket Handkerchief," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 27 (1995): 221--35 (228).

also credits Richard with introducing throughout his court something akin to the personal handkerchief for cleansing the nose.[43]

Gower's insurgents contrast starkly with such hygienic aristocrats. An affront to cleanliness, Wat Tyler is described in the *Visio* as "tegula feda" (a dirty/foul roof-tile) in the formulation "Turris, vbi pressit vi tegula feda coronam" (The Tower, where the foul roof-tile pressed the crown) (l. 1759). Tyler's presence transforms the Tower into a place not scented with incense but sick (l. 1761). With his filthiness, Tyler is a synecdoche for the larger body of rebels, since the *Visio* associates rebels in general with filth, categorizing them as "gens sordida" (a dirty people) (l. 773). This epithet for the rebels, particularly since "sordidus" denotes "filthy" and "uncivilized" as well as indicating people of low rank (*OLD* 1794), renders filth an ontological condition for the lower orders. Although Daniel of Beccles directs readers not to penetrate the chambers of a mansion in which one is a guest,[44] immediately following a complaint about the swine's consumption of food and wine, Gower writes that the pigs trample their filth into royal homes (l. 371). The dogs behave in a similar manner: "Hii quibus in nocte solito fimus extitit hospes, / Mollibus in lectis sordida membra fouent" (Those to whom a heap of dung had ordinarily been host at night pamper their filthy limbs in soft bed) (ll. 421--22). Rebels are not only filthy but are the purveyors of death and disease.[45] Gower likens rebels to the biblical plagues of frogs and flies (ll. 569--98). Equating insurgents with the flies that tormented Pharaoh's

43. Ibid.

44. Daniel of Beccles, 47 (ll. 1360--65).

45. Gower's self-representation as old and blind is one which, as Jeremy Dimmick noted in "Gower's Effortful *Otium*," Sixteenth International Congress of the New Chaucer Society, University of Wales, Swansea, U.K., 18--22 July 2008, routinely appears in the Dedicatory Epistle in extant *Vox* mss. Although such a self-representation might appear to contradict the alignment of the affluent with health and regeneration, Gower's blindness and ill health are represented as consequences of nearing the end of a natural life cycle.

Egypt, the *Visio* remarks that all kinds of flies come vowing to bite and sting everything wholesome (ll. 569--70). Deploying more food motifs, Gower writes that no pot of meat is without a fly and no dish is so well covered that flies are prevented from entering (ll. 607--8). Recalling the plague of frogs, rebels eat all food and provisions and spread their potent poisons everywhere (ll. 581--84). Shortly thereafter, all wickedness of a worse vein suddenly breaks out, and the air infects honest men (ll. 755--56). The insurgents are inherently a "pestifera plebs" (a pestilent people) (l. 1974). Fittingly, a large assembly of pigs poisons the surrounding air and befouls the surrounding fields with dung (ll. 301--4, 643--44). The filthy swine despoil the world, against which nothing clean could safely stand and fight (ll. 311--12). Through their contagion, insurgents purvey disease to those who lead healthy lives, to those in good physical and sound moral and spiritual health, and to those who had enjoyed wholesome living.

As their spreading of poisons indicates, rebels are associated with sterility. This sterility is manifest in the oxen's abandonment of the plow, causing the narrator to lament that the cultivation of fields will cease and famine must be feared (ll. 297--98). Barrenness is also evident in the rebels' wanton waste and destruction of food, rendered vividly in the image of enraged insurgents sprinkling the well-set dining tables with blood and drenching the scattered food with drops of gore, while no chamber provided men with a healthful place (ll. 1209-12). This bloodying of the well-set dining table outrageously violates the courtesy dictates against sullying a clean tablecloth with food and drink. Adhering to Wat Tyler's reductive directives---"Strike!" and "Kill!" (l. 715)---insurgents, with their penchant for slaughter, writ large in their irreverent execution of the Archbishop of Canterbury, are aligned with annihilation,[46] an annihilation

46. In "Violence and the Sacrificial Poet: Gower, the *Vox*, and the Critics" in *On John Gower: Essays at the Millenium*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), 124--43, Eve Salisbury notes that the *Visio*'s Wat Tyler is associated with

reprised in the *Confessio Amantis* through Gower's comparisons between the rebels and the dregs that arise in a cask of wine and break the tun, a stream that breaches its banks with near disastrous consequences, and the Tigris that overflows without mercy (Pro.ll. 499-510, and Latin passage at l. 499).[47] In the *Visio*, Gower's rebels narcissistically indulge their bodily impulses not only for leisure and for drinking, eating, and sleeping, but also for aggressivity. Unleashing their aggressive impulses, insurgents become a destructive force that imperils the existence of late medieval English society and of Civilization itself. While a structuring principle of medieval courtesy manuals is that bodily impulses must be restrained for society to thrive, the *Visio* takes this stance to its logical extreme, linking the overthrow of the dictates of courtesy surrounding food, speech, and proper hygiene to the demise of civilization.

Aligned with disease, death, and sterility, the rebels occupy a place of queerness in many ways akin to the persistence of the death drive delineated by Edelman, where queerness is a structural alterity, a non-place "outside the conflict of visions that share as their presupposition that the body political must survive," a locus of negativity opposed to every form of social viability and to the future itself.[48] Insurgents create an environment that contrasts starkly with the

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disease, barrenness, and drought. Salisbury argues that destruction in the *Vox* is structured by a prominent rhetoric and logic of sacrifice wherein violence has symbolic meaning and ultimately serves specific ends. By contrast, I view the *Visio*'s understanding of destruction, specifically by rebels, in a more Edelmanesque manner in which violence and annihilation serve no higher purpose but are impulsive and chaotic, qualities that make insurgent violence so threatening.

47. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, vol. 1, *The English Works of John Gower*, Early English Text Society, e.s. 81 (London: Oxford University Press, 1900). Siân Echard and Claire Fanger, eds. and trans., *The Latin Verses in the "Confessio Amantis": An Annotated Translation* (East Lansing: Colleagues Press, 1991), 10, n16, indicate that "Tigridis" can be translated either as "tiger" or as "Tigris."

48. Edelman, 3, 9.

bounty of nature burgeoning in the *Visio*'s first chapter.[49] There, Phoebus reigns in majesty while the four seasons pass his throne, with summer closest at hand. Under summer's guidance, animals mate, mother birds feed their young, grass burgeons, and leaves and fruit blossom. Flowers carpet the meadows, the land is fertile, medicinal herbs flourish, and the earth teems with life, while Venus demands that youth love. The opening chapter situates England in a period of regeneration, amidst which the following specter appears: "Iam legit ingenua violas sibi compta puella / Rustica, quas nullo terra serente vehit" (Already a gentle peasant girl attired herself with violets, / which, sown by no one, the earth bears) (ll. 55--56).[50] This image is one of fecundity: the violets spring up of their own accord, and the girl, because of her youth and her future capacity for childbearing, is an icon of reproductive futurity. This reproductive promise is further reinscribed by her self-adornment with blossoming flowers, since women's wombs are often equated with gardens in late medieval writings. By specifying that the girl is simultaneously "rustica" and "ingenua," this image suggests a prelapsarian state before class division and strife. Once rebels arrive, this girl, along with the promise of futurity that she represents, vanishes.

The rebels' emphatic indulgence of bodily impulses threatens not only to hasten England's demise and the end of civilization but also imperils meaning itself. This threat to meaning is evident at the foundational site of language. As Gower's rebels metamorphose into various beasts, with few exceptions they seem incapable of forming recognizable words and

49. On Ovid's influence in chapter one, see Eve Salisbury, "Remembering Origins: Gower's Monstrous Body Poetic," in *Re-Visioning Gower*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1998), 159--84 (165--68).

50. I am grateful to Tamara O'Callaghan, Lisa Weston, and Bruce Vernarde for dissuading me from willfully mistranslating this line.

phrases.[51] While courtesy guides insist on the importance of carefully orchestrated speech, rebels are so far removed from such conduct that their reign of terror requires little language. Even beyond the linguistic, the insurgents are constructed as largely antithetical to meaning. The *Visio* ascribes them an emphatic degree of unintelligibility. Apart from such clichéd rationales as gluttony and wrath, when attributed motivations, Gower's rebels are frequently impelled by negativity, logic evident, for example, in their understanding of justice. Insurgents are ascribed no new comprehension of justice, only a desire to destroy the justice that exists. This pattern is evident when Wat Tyler spurs on his troops, commanding "Solue nephas" (Let wickedness loose) (l. 716). Seeking to conquer the forces of Good with which the *Visio* aligns Gower and his colleagues, Tyler's mandate does not move beyond a binaristic inversion of good and evil, to offer new terms of debate. Similarly, rebels propel the social body to the brink of disaster without positing another vision of how to articulate socioeconomic relations or rank, a proposition reiterated in Nebuchadnezzar's dream in the *Confessio*'s Prologue where the unstable feet of earth and steel destroy the entire body with no other versions of the social body appearing on the bleak horizon to take its place.[52] Just as the *Visio*'s rebels destabilize socioeconomic identities, they also destabilize identities in queerer ways. As Kim Zarins points out, the beasts engage in interspecies coupling.[53] At a certain point in the *Visio*, speciation itself

51. Kim Zarins, "From Head to Foot: Syllabic Play and Metamorphosis in Book I of Gower's *Vox Clamantis*," in *On John Gower*, 144--60, reads the rebels' speech as syllabic play. Both of us see the curiously hybrid beastly bodies as intertwined with the insurgents' linguistic patterns, and both of us understand the rebels as largely antithetical to conventional meaning, albeit through different means and with my reading foregrounding annihilation.

52. Lynn Arner, *Chaucer, Gower, and the Vernacular Rising: Poetry and the Problem of the Populace After 1381* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2013), 91--92.

53. Zarins, 154.

breaks down. The *Visio* conjures visions of rebels as beasts who mix anatomical traits of sundry animals to generate striking new creations. The ass exchanges his lengthy ears for long horns (ll. 225--26) and sports a longer tail than the lion (ll. 233--34). Oxen adopt bears' feet and dragons' tails and blow sulphurous flames from their mouths (ll. 255--58). The cock usurps the falcon's beak and talons (l. 521). At the level of bodily performances, Gower's rebels flagrantly disregard visual and corporeal traits considered ontologically appropriate and thereby dramatically unsettle bodies and identities. Rebels eventually liquidate identities in a more totalizing manner, as they shed their human and animal forms to merge with the oceans and unite with the winds, pouring themselves into an amorphous flow with the natural elements. The insurgents represent the annihilation of physical differences and their attendant classificatory systems. Under the pressure of the rebels, almost everything collapses into an undifferentiated ocean shrouded in darkness.

The manifestation of the unruly populace as biblical plagues foregrounds temporality as another register of meaning on which rebels unleash chaos. When the insurgents enter London, the city devolves under their influence, a devolution that, in part, insists on the primitivism of non-ruling classes. With rusticity wreaking havoc on dining halls, wealthy homes, and holy places, the city collapses and decays, moving from a seat of civility into a wild, savage world of nature. Atavistic rustici push the metropolis, the geographic and symbolic seat of civility, steadily back into the primordial ooze**.** The narrative action eventually slides into a dense, ancient forest, unscathed by any ax (l. 1435). Although the narrator announces, "Sic fugiens abii subite contagia cladis" (Thus I went to flee the contagions of the sudden disaster) (l. 1379), the atavism associated with the rebels infects him. Exiled in his own land, he starts to go native, devolving into beastliness. Veering into wodwo territory, he abandons his home for a bed of grass and leaves; he consumes grass and, like a wild boar, eats acorns from the forest floor; and

he travels like a rabbit and longs to hide beneath the bark of a tree. Becoming unrecognizable to himself, his human form seems to vanish (ll. 1431--90).[54] In the woods, Gower's persona—incredibly—even loses some ability to speak. Dread makes him abort his speech so that he holds out his arms to signify what his tongue is unable to utter (ll. 1469--72).[55] The narrator reiterates multiple times that he wishes to speak but that his tongue, through fear, is slowed down or numb (ll. 1493--94, 1511--16). The threat insurgents pose to language appears contagious: it is as if the narrator is infected by the rebels' rhetorical impediments.[56] The narrator's devolution eventually ceases, no doubt in part because he possesses an inner metal that renders him incapable of remaining in the depths of barbarism inhabited by the lower ranks. Instead, the narrator's foray into the woods is, in the end, a mark of distinction, for this foray codes him as what Yoshiko Kobayshi and Kathryn McKinley have identified as an Ovidian exile and thereby as the inheritor of a great Ovidian tradition.[57] The *Visio* offers a lament for the loss of the social, encapsulated by isolation in the woods and by the disintegration of language. Literature is offered as that which

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54. For a discussion of Gower's Ovidian analogue here, see Maura Nolan, "The Poetics of Catastrophe: Ovidian Allusion in Gower's *Vox Clamantis*," in *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature: Essays in Honour of Jill Mann*, ed. Christopher Cannon and Maura Nolan (Cambridge, UK: D. S. Brewer, 2011), 112--24.

55. Zarins, 155, points out that, like his voice, the narrator's metrical foot also staggers.

56. In late medieval English literature, when a dominant group wishes to stage an encounter with a subordinate, allegedly less advanced group, the encounter is not infrequently set in an earlier epoch. In grappling with barbarians or semi-barbarians civilized Englishmen risk going native. See Lynn Arner, "The Ends of Enchantment: Colonialism and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 48 (2006): 79--101 (84--87), for an example of this pattern.

57. Yoshiko Kobayashi, "The Voice of an Exile: From Ovidian Lament to Prophecy in Book I of John Gower's *Vox Clamantis*," in *Through a Classical Eye: Transcultural and Transhistorical Visions in Medieval English, Italian, and Latin Literature in Honour of Winthrop Wetherbee*, ed. Andrew Galloway and R. F. Yeager (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 339--62; and Kathryn McKinley, "The View from the Tower: Revisiting Gower, 1381, and *Vox Clamantis* Book 1," *Mediaevalia* 29 (2008), 31--52 (45--47).

can mark and make meaningful the end of meaning, a prospect that sanctions the poet as the last bastion of civilization, the voice crying in the wilderness.

Structurally, the forest (chap. 16) occupies a transitional space between the rebels' attack on London (chaps. 2--15) and the battering of the Tower of London (chaps. 17--18). After the narrator's descent into a lamentable nativism ends, he finds his way to the Tower of London, where he takes refuge with fellow citizens, who are Brutus's people, residuals from the destruction of Troy. The devolution ushered in by rebels is emphatic in the post-forest scenes, since rebels have become physically indistinguishable from the wind, rain, storms, and floods that batter the Tower of London, the bastion of civility in which citizens cower against the onslaught. Hence, the opposition to civilization that rebels presented, through their alignment with untamed nature against refinement, is writ large in this conflation of the rebels with natural elements. The Tower is engulfed in a temporal and spatial stew. At times the Tower represents Brutus's ship sailing to New Troy, while, intermittently, the Tower is akin to Noah's ark. Likewise, the spaces the vessel traverses are uncharted.[58] It is as if Gower and his colleagues exist in a time capsule and offer an amulet against death, guarding the culture of the present and past for the future, a legacy preserved in spite of the ubiquitous threat of barbarism, a stance echoed in gentler tones in the *Confessio*'s oft-quoted opening lines (Pro. 1--11). Immediately following the movment into the ship, the *Visio* evokes the creation story from Genesis, where land and sea intermingle, and everything is shrouded in darkness, before God separated the heavens from the earth (ll. 1793--810, 1907--27). Under the pressure of the uncontrollable populace, England devolves into the chaos at the beginning of creation. This digression cannot

58. On London as New Troy in the *Visio*, see Sylvia Federico, *New Troy: Fantasies of Empire in the Late Middle Ages* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), esp. chap. 1; and Kobayashi, "Voice of an Exile."

be read as strictly teleological throughout the *Visio*, however, since, following the initial appearance of the rebels, the poem, largely inattentive to chronologies, offers a cornucopia of references to people, events, and cultural artifacts in the Old and New Testaments and in ancient Greek and Roman history. The temporal disjunctions and spatial mélange throughout the *Visio*—most emphatic, however, in the Tower of London scenes and in the return to a state of Genesis—contrast dramatically with the orderly, predictable cyclical time associated in chapter one with the seasons, the growth of vegetation, and the rising and setting of the sun.[59] While the seasonal time of chapter one bespeaks futurity, the regressive temporality that the rebels usher in produces degeneration and chaos.

Eventually, God intervenes to create spatial and social demarcations, separating the earth from the seas and saving the ship's noble inhabitants; at the same time, Christ forbids the death of the nobles and brings them health (ll. 1909--30). Regarding non-ruling classes, Gower pens,

> Sic cum rusticitas fuerat religata cathenis
>
> Et paciens nostro subiacet illa pede,
>
> Ad iuga bos rediit, que sub aruis semen aratis
>
> Creuit, et a bello rusticus ipse silet.
>
> [Thus with the peasantry anchored in chains and laying submissively subjected under our feet and reduced to oxen, in plowed fields the seed grew, and the peasant silences himself regarding war] ll.2093--96

The bodies of the non-ruling classes are made docile. Rustici are once again harnessed to the plow, producing food rather than wantonly squandering it. As the ox metaphor betrays, these men and women remain beasts but are now subject to physical regulation: they engage in

59. McKinley, 43, reads the dissolution of the Tower as symbolizing the economic threat embodied in the insurrection.

suitable occupations and circulate in appropriate spaces. Silent and stripped of autonomy, these ranks are also yoked to their rightful positions politically. Meanwhile, Gower and his fellow occupants of the Tower of London resume their full rights as citizens of England. Once rebels are vanquished, the specter of futurity from chapter one re-emerges, this time reincarnated in the term "futurus." Gower concludes with a claim to write his dream of truth as an exemplum for "futurus" ("the future," "the future one," or "the yet unborn one") (l. 2144). With the socioeconomic order firmly reinstated, bodies properly regulated and confined to appropriate spaces, England's health and prosperity are restored: civility and civilization can flourish, and the future is promising.

The *Visio* subjected the rebels to a new kind of knowledge production that attempted to contain them. Through logic employed by late medieval courtesy manuals and through an intersecting discourse of civility, the *Visio* constructed a catalog of comportment that offered an elaborate network of ways of knowing the rebels and the larger non-ruling classes. This classificatory system promoted numerous categories in which the comportment of these groups marked them as deficient: rebels and non-ruling groups lacked distinction; they demonstrated rhetorical impediments, signifying weak intellectual capacities; and their poor etiquette signaled moral and spiritual impoverishment. Such knowledge generated an additional set of justifications, buttressing the *Visio*'s more obvious claims (such as the rebels' alignment with Satan and their descent from Cain), to support an argument that the non-ruling classes were incapable of participating in their own governance and must be excluded from political affairs. Not surprisingly, the dream vision insisted that the insurrection failed to articulate alternate possibilities for the social order. Instead, with their actions propelled not by reason but by uncontrollable impulses and drives, the rebels unleashed a chaos that threatened to engulf

England and to disrupt the foundations of civilization itself. As this specter of annihilation attested, the *Visio* maintained that the rising imperiled the only version of the social formation possible. To contain their destructive potential, the subordinate classes needed to be closely monitored by the ruling classes, who were England's rightful governors, since as the logic of courtesy manuals and its attendant discourse of civility attested, the ruling classes possessed intellectual, moral, and spiritual superiority beyond that of the populace. It was the ruling classes who guaranteed the health and futurity of England. The *Visio* hence assigned the ruling classes authority in political affairs while promoting the containment of their socioeconomic underlings.

Gower understood the production of poetry to be an appropriate response to an insurrection of the populace, in keeping with his larger perception of poetry as a powerful site at which to engage in political struggle. Gower's borrowings from a corpus of texts centrally concerned with instruction in comportment indicated that he understood literature to possess the potential to help regulate unruly bodies, to be a vehicle of social engineering. The *Visio*'s cataloging impulse offered a way to discipline and impose order on a volatile political landscape, a means of constructing authority against an uncontrollable multitude. While courtesy manuals explicitly prescribed behavior in ways that reinforced the socioeconomic hierarchy, the *Visio* transported such behavioral policing of bodies into the realm of literature, making such dictates more entertaining and erudite and, ultimately, more amenable to strategies of social control. By mobilizing heavily didactic manuals involving codes of physical conduct and by rendering them literarily, Gower moved these techniques of power into a different register, generative of new forms of social governance over the non-ruling classes. At the nascence of an explosion in the production of Middle English poetry structured by Greco-Roman and European literature, Gower forwarded poetry as an effective means of social control.

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