



Accessus:

A Journal of Premodern Literature and New Media

Accessus

Volume 3 | Issue 2

Article 1

2016

Foreword

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Recommended Citation

Donavin, Georgiana and Salisbury, Eve (2016) "Foreword," *Accessus*: Vol. 3 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/accessus/vol3/iss2/1>

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Foreword

In this issue of *Accessus* we present an extended commentary on John Gower's *Vox Clamantis*, Book VI, Chapter 7: Robert J. Meindl's "The Failure of Counsel: Curial Corruption in Book VI of the *Vox Clamantis*." In what may be considered a complementary piece to the earlier "Semper Venalis: Gower's Avaricious Lawyers" (*Accessus* 1.2) Meindl continues his explications of Gower's position on legal guardians and the *curia* by focusing on the poet's growing concern about the king's maturity, the efficacy of the counselors around him, and the state of England on the precipice of a new age. In Meindl's translation and elucidation of this section of the *Vox*, especially Gower's revisions of the early A-Text into the later B-Text, we see an important pivot in the poet's approach to King Richard II. Meindl's reading illuminates not only the poet's political views of English society during a tumultuous time, but also the underlying reasons for a pervasive discontent driving a popular call for change. Capturing the tenor and tone of the *vox Dei* and the *vox populi* enfolded into Gower's Latin voice, Meindl's translation and commentary reveal the rhetorical strategies and philosophical principles through which the poet exposed curial corruption.

As Meindl points out in his discussion, "The seventh chapter of Book VI of the *Vox Clamantis* (VI, 469–580) is the final element in Gower's analysis of England's legal guardians before he comes specifically to the king himself, fountainhead of the law and subject of the *speculum principis* that comprises Chapters 8–18 and the climax of Book VI." "The Failure of Counsel" thus concentrates on the *Vox*'s lines concerning Richard II's advisers and the king's relationship to them before it moves into an epistle directing the poet's advice to the monarch. Chapter 7 of Book VI, with its revised B-Text and reliance on Isidore's and Gratian's theories of the "ages of man" to excuse the immaturity of a king and suggest his irresponsibility in dealing

with curial corruption, reveals Gower's thinking over a decade about Richard's judgment and conduct in response to various advising bodies. A king who, by the premature and unforeseen death of his father, ascends the English throne at age ten only to demonstrate a marked puerility even into his twenties, gives the poet pause. Richard's perceived immaturity is but one reason the king's counsellors are so crucial to the governance of the realm and the efficacy of its laws.

Meindl's translation and explanatory notes on this section of the *Vox* invite our readers to follow the evolution of Gower's position on Richard II and his court in conclusions that may be adjusted according to experience, even when built upon a network of recognizable metaphors: the idea of counsel as the rudder of a ship of state guided by capable hands, a precisely cut beam for a house built in love, or a parliament gathered together in peace. While such metaphors may strike us as uncomplementary, mixed and therefore at odds with one another, in their juxtaposition they disrupt conventional ways of thinking, prompting an audience to envision a viable future without forgetting the past: "scripture veteris capiunt exempla futuri." If Thomas Bradwardine's theory of memory is present in Gower's composition strategies, then the mixing of metaphors is consistent with a concept that urges an audience to think about the implications of such convergences. For the Oxford mathematician and theologian contradictory verbal images were cause for remembrance, designed to be recalled and used in "pious functions such as meditation and preaching."¹ Cast within the discordant political environment of late medieval England, Gower's mixed metaphors prompt a Latin-reading audience to remember that the steering of a ship, the building of a house, and the peaceful assembly of a diverse population are crucial to humanity's survival.

1. See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 137.

Treating Gower's metaphors, medieval legal codes, and more, Meindl's commentary constitutes a contemporary version of the medieval *accessus*, his translation and interpretive remarks aiding the reader's access to challenging Latin and complicated political scenes while preparing the poem for remediation in innovative, twenty-first-century technologies. Electronic journals such as *Accessus* enable the publication of articles that exceed limitations on length imposed by conventional print journals while making hyperlinks possible for navigation between one text and another. From "Failure of Counsel," for instance, readers might click on Meindl's complete translation of the *Vox*'s Book 6 in The Gower Project [Translation Wiki](#). Such technological advances prompt a deeper look into Gower's Latin corpus and a reconsideration of how it speaks to the poems in Middle English and French, as well as to other medieval and classical texts and to contemporary theory. In the nearly three years that *Accessus* has been available, our readers have been encouraged to look through mirrors, enter alternate worlds of reality, and recognize how often the present is anticipated in Gower's work.

Since the beginning we have made a commitment to explications of the less-studied and vastly misunderstood *Vox*: appearing in our first issue, Lynn Arner's "Civility and Gower's *Visio Anglie*" focuses on Gower's perceptions of the rebels of the Rising of 1381 so graphically depicted in Book I, while in our second, Meindl's "*Semper Venalis*: Gower's Avaricious Lawyers," provides both translation and commentary on the first three chapters of Book VI. In addition to these publications, Meindl's translation of the entirety of Book VI has been rendered accessible through The Gower Project's [Translation Wiki](#), an enterprise that reaches out to amateur translators as well as to academics.

Initiatives such as these offer exciting new approaches to a language that many consider to be "dead." In Gower's age Latin was a living language, spoken even by those of limited

linguistic expertise as they conducted business, appeared in court, or said their prayers. As many scholars have pointed out, Latin was certainly not the expression of elites in Gower's trilingual England, but rather a mode of communication equivalent to the vernacularity of English and French.² Whether learned at the hearth or in school, Latin constituted one familiar choice in England's tripartite verbal palette, and an author such as Gower might code-switch from one language to another, depending on the textual or social situation. When Meindl comments on the *Vox Clamantis*, as he does in the article presented in this issue, he reactivates the language that Gower learned in early childhood and continued to use as an adult. By projecting Gower's persona in an English translation and by revealing the complex allusions woven into the *Vox*, Meindl rejuvenates the voice of the poet from whom we still have much to learn.

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2. Christopher Cannon, "Vernacular Latin," in "Competing Archives, Competing Histories: French and Its Cultural Locations in Late-Medieval England," *Speculum: A Journal of Medieval Studies* 90.3 (2015): 641-53.