Gower´s Queer Poetics in the Mirour de l'Omme

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It is fatal [for a writer] to be a man or woman pure and simple; one must be woman-

manly or man-womanly…Some collaboration has to take place in the mind between

the woman and the man before the art of creation can be accomplished.

(Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*)

Although the volume of criticism on John Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme* is relatively small,

a significant number of studies have highlighted the poem's preoccupation with language,

rhetoric, and poetics. R. F. Yeager, for instance, has argued that the poem is "about poetic

antecedents and the relation of language to right living," while Maura Nolan has examined

Gower's poetics and the relationship in the poem between the literary and the didactic.[1] In a brief

but groundbreaking analysis of the *Mirour* in *Amoral Gower*, a book mainly devoted to the

Confessio Amantis, Diane Watt has taken the question of language in the poem in a different

direction by demonstrating the centrality of gender and sexuality to the poem's exploration of

language and rhetoric.[2] To Watt, Gower "links sexual confusion to linguistic indeterminacy and

associates both with division and sin."[3] Watt's gender and queer theory approach to Gower's

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[1] Robert F. Yeager, "John Gower's French," in *A Companion to Gower,* ed. Siân Echard (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2004), 143. Yeager also states that "the *Mirour* is, like the *Roman de la Rose* (and the *Divine Comedy*, for that matter) also about language" (144). Maura Nolan, "Agency and the Poetics of Sensation in Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme,*" in *Answerable Style*, ed. Frank Grady and Andrew Galloway (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2013), 214–43. See also Kurt O. Olsson, "Rhetoric, John Gower and the Late Medieval *Exemplum,*" *Medievalia et Humanistica* 8 (1977): 185–200, for an analysis of rhetoric in the *Mirour*.

[2] Diane Watt, *Amoral Gower* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003).

Anglo-Norman poem has been further (if briefly) developed by recent critics, such as Kim Zarins and Jonathan Hsy.[4] In the context of these critics' insights into the *Mirour* and recent work by other scholars who have brought queer, intersex, and trans perspectives to medieval literature and culture, this article will demonstrate that the poem's exploration of gender, sex, and language has even deeper implications than have been recognized so far.[5] In his Anglo-Norman poem, I will argue, Gower develops an authorial voice and a poetics that in its embrace of male and female can be identified as queer.

Attention to the link between language and gender in the *Mirour* has been drawn in part due to a fascinating passage that appears one thousand lines into the poem. Early on in the poem, after describing the fall of Satan and the births of Sin, Death, and the Deadly Sins, Gower describes the daughters who are born from the marriage between the World and each of the Seven Deadly Sins as follows:

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[3] Watt, *Amoral Gower*, xvi. While this quote refers specifically to the *Confessio*, Watt argues in chapter 1 that a similar notion is at play in the *Mirour*. The full quote is as follows: "what might be characterized as the queer gender play of *Confessio* links sexual confusion to linguistic indeterminacy and associates both with division and sin" (xvi).

[4] See Kim Zarins, "Intersex and the Pardoner's Body," *Accessus: A Journal of Premodern Literature and New Media* 4, no. 1 (2018): 1–63, an article that centers on intersexuality and Chaucer's Pardoner, but also develops Watt's insights on the relation between gender and language in Gower's Anglo-French poem, and Jonathan Hsy, "Linguistic Entrapment: Interlanguage, Bivernacularity, and Life Across Tongues," *postmedieval* 9, no.2 (2018): 196–208, which draws parallels between what Hsy sees as Gower's experimentation with languages, arising from his bivernacularity, and his experimentation with gender in the *Mirour*.

[5] Among recent studies that analyze medieval texts through queer perspectives, see issues 9, no.2, "Medieval Intersex: Language and Hermaphroditism," ed. Ruth Evans, and 9, no.3, "Queer Manuscripts," ed. Roberta Magnani and Diane Watt, of the journal *postmedieval*, both published in 2018. For a recent article on intersexuality in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, see M. W. Bychowski, "Unconfessing Transgender: Dysphoric Youths and the Medicalization of Madness in John Gower's 'Tale of Iphis and Ianthe,'" *Accessus* 3, no.1 (2016): 1–38.

> Entendre devetz tout avant,
>
> Tous ceux dont vous irray contant,
>
> Comme puis orretz l'estoire dite,
>
> Naiscont du merveillous semblant;
>
> Car de nature a leur naiscant
>
> Trestous sont mostre hermafodrite;
>
> Sicome le livre m'en recite,
>
> Ce sont quant double forme habite
>
> Femelle et madle en un enfant:
>
> Si noun de femme les endite,
>
> Les filles dont je vous endite
>
> Sont auci homme nepourquant. (1021–32)[6]

(You should understand in advance that all these I am going to tell you about, as later you will hear the story told, were born with strange appearance, for at birth by nature all were hermaphroditic monsters. As the book tells me these are when a double form, female and male, lives in a child. If I lay on them the name female, the daughters of whom I am telling you are nonetheless also males.)[7]

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[6] G. C. Macaulay, ed., *The Works of John Gower: The French Works* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1899). All quotations from the *Mirour* come from this edition.

[7] John Gower, *Mirour de l'Omme (The Mirror of Mankind)*, trans. William Burton Wilson (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1992). Translations from the *Mirour* come from Wilson.

This is a striking passage. Few Middle English or Anglo-Norman literary works invoke the

figure of the "hermafodrite" or "hermaphrodite" as directly and explicitly as Gower does here.[8] It

is a passage, moreover, that makes intersexuality more than a trope, for "hermafodrite" refers

both to the allegorical Sins and to the human "enfant" that Gower tells us he read about.[9] As

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[8] The term "hermaphrodite," a term that in the Middle Ages was primarily associated with Ovid's story about Hermaphroditus from his *Metamorphoses* (IV.315–88), seems to have been rarely used in Anglo-Norman and Middle English texts. The entry for "hermaphrodite" in the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* (*The Anglo-Norman Online Hub,* http://www.anglo-norman.net/, accessed July 1, 2018) gives only the *Mirour* as an example of a text that uses the term. The term is also infrequent in Middle English works. The *Middle English Dictionary* (https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary, accessed August 20, 2019) provides no examples prior to the late fourteenth century. The examples from the late fourteenth century are just four, three of them from John Trevisa's translations of Ranulph Higden's *Polychronicon* and of Bartholomew de Glanville's (Bartholomaeus Anglicus) *De Proprietatibus rerum* and one from the Wycliffite tract "Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards." Trevisa's references are to hermaphroditism as a biological reality, while the Lollard text uses the term in a figurative sense: those who meddle with both spiritual and the secular are hermaphrodites. See Carolyn Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval: Sexualities and Communities, Pre- and Postmodern* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999) for an analysis of the passage that mentions hermaphroditism in the Lollard *Conclusions* (79–80). To note that the number of citations in the Middle English Dictionary is small, of course, is not to argue that intersexuality is absent in all other Middle English texts. Chaucer's Pardoner, for instance, can be seen as a hermaphroditic figure, as Beryl Rowland, "Animal Imagery and the Pardoner," *Neophilologus* 48 (1964): 56–60, a few decades ago, and Zarins, "Intersex and the Pardoner's Body," more recently, have argued. Other medieval texts, as examined in the issue *postmedieval* noted above, also explore notions of intersexuality. Gower's explicit use of the term suggests a pointed interest in exploring intersexuality in both its literal and figurative senses.

[9] In their "Trans & Genderqueer Studies Terminology, Language, and Usage, Guide" (Pre-Print Final accessed at bit.ly/tgqsguidejune19, an appendix to their forthcoming edited volume, *Trans and Genderqueer Subjects in Medieval Hagiography* [Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020]), Alicia Spencer-Hall and Blake Gutt note that "hermaphrodite" "is an antiquated term for individuals who would now be referred to as intersex. It is offensive in modern usage . . . For the most part, the intersex community has rejected the term as both pathological (because of its relation to medical abuse and authority) and social stigma. However, some reclaim the term" (15). Considering Spencer-Hall and Blake's observations, in this article I will use "hermaphrodite" when referring specifically to Gower's own usage or to its usage in mythological and figural contexts. I will use the term "intersex" when discussing the reality of intersex individuals.

Zarins has argued, the passage "gets closer to the reality of intersex than the Hermaphroditus myth does. In the Hermaphroditus narrative, intersexuality is not a reality at birth; it happens to a beautiful careless boy who swims in waters far from home. Gower is trying to dehumanize these intersex daughters, and yet notes their childhood, their infancy."[10] Gower's exploration of intersex is as much guided by a figurative sense of the term as it is by a recognition that there are actual human beings who are intersex. Gower's passage, furthermore, draws our attention to the difficulty he faces when writing about the Sins, precisely because they are intersex.[11] The Sins' intersexual anatomy presents him with what Marjorie Garber, writing about crossdressing, called some time ago a "category crisis."[12]

This category crisis is indicative, I will argue, of a related category crisis that Gower grapples within the poem, his notion of his own authorial persona, and provides a key to understanding his poem and his poetics. Throughout the first two parts of the *Mirour*, Gower discusses the sins and virtues and critiques the estates in society at great length, presenting himself as a stern and moralistic poet. Just before the third and last part of the poem, the life of the Virgin Mary, he confesses that earlier in his life, prior to writing the *Mirour*, he used to be a different kind of poet, a courtly poet, and repents from engaging in courtly practices. Despite this disavowal of his pre-*Mirour* courtly style, though, in his life of the Virgin Mary Gower departs to some extent from the moralistic style of the first two parts of the *Mirour* and returns to a

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[10] Zarins, "Intersex," 49.

[11] Watt suggests in *Amoral Gower* that the passage seems like an incongruous moment, for it comes "too late," after Gower has already written about allegorical figures who are both male and female (27).

[12] Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Crossdressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York: Routledge, 1992).

poetics that is more courtly than moralistic. Writing about these stylistic shifts, Nolan has argued

that "the *Mirour* reveals a tentative poet seeking to forge an authorial identity out of various

cultural materials."[13] Identifying at least three genres in the poem—sermons, estates satire, and

lives of the Virgin Mary—Nolan observes that "the introduction of the confessional mode [right

before his life of the Virgin Mary] retrospectively frames the entire project, making the three

genres that comprise the *Mirour* part of a highly personalized narrative of sin and forgiveness."[14]

I agree with Nolan's observation. However, as I will argue in this article, in order to fully

understand this reframing and Gower's exploration of his authorial identity, we need to examine

the queer implications of the language he uses in his confession and throughout the poem. It is no

coincidence that he explicitly retracts his pre-*Mirour* courtly poetry and practices, primarily,

because they were gender ambiguous or queer.

By rejecting his earlier courtly poetry and associating it with both linguistic and sexual

indeterminacy, Gower enacts a kind of authorial self-disciplining process akin to the self-

disciplining of rhetoric that, as Rita Copeland has shown in "The Pardoner's Body and the

Disciplining of Rhetoric," is evident in the writings of many classical and medieval authors.[15]

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[13] Nolan, "Agency and the Poetics of Sensation," 215. Gower's exploration of his roles as poet and authorial persona is also central to the *Confessio Amantis.* See, for instance, in addition to Watt, *Amoral Gower*, A. J. Minnis, *Medieval Theory of Authorship: Scholastic Literary Attitudes in the Later Middle Ages* (London: Scholar Press, 1984), and Ardis Butterfield, "Articulating the Author: Gower and the French Vernacular Codex," *The Yearbook of English Studies* 33 (2003): 80–96.

[14] Nolan, "Agency and the Poetics of Sensation," 222.

[15] Rita Copeland, "The Pardoner's Body and the Disciplining of Rhetoric," in *Framing Medieval Bodies*, ed. Sarah Kay and Miri Rubin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 138–59. For Roman rhetoricians, Copeland observes, "artifice is inscribed on the body" (145). She further shows that the association between the misleading and ambiguously gendered body and rhetoric is evident, for instance, in Chaucer's Pardoner: "it is the Pardoner's bodily presence, the sexual ambiguity of his bodily appearance, that most clearly associates him with

What Copeland calls "the metaphorical tradition of rhetoric as unregulated sexuality" and the anxiety produced by the indeterminacy of rhetoric and gender that she identifies in such writings also operate in the *Mirour* and illuminate Gower's exploration of language and authorship in the poem.[16] Copeland further observes that "rhetoric can legitimize itself as a true discipline if it can expose—and thus subject to severe disciplinary scrutiny—its own capacity for distortion. In other words, rhetoric needs its own potential for transgression in order to demonstrate its capacity for self-discipline."[17] In his confession Gower exposes his pre-*Mirour* poetical and gender transgressions in order to demonstrate his capacity for self-discipline.

Gower's self-critique and self-disciplining is a response, I will further argue, to what David Rollo has called the "hermaphroditic poetics" apparent in two works whose influence can be traced in the *Mirour*: Alan de Lille's *De Planctu Naturae* and Jean de Meun's *Roman de la Rose*.[18] Noting first that Remigius of Auxerre saw Ovid's Hermaphroditus as "a figure for the pleasures of poetry," Rollo sees similar associations in Alain de Lille's *De Planctu Naturae*,

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the representation of rhetoric in the tradition that leads from Quintilian to the medieval language arts" (149).

[16] Copeland, "The Pardoner's Body," 149.

[17] Copeland, "The Pardoner's Body," 145.

[18] David Rollo, *Kiss My Relics: Hermaphroditic Fictions of the Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011). See also David Rollo, "Venerating Nature's deviance in the *Roman de la Rose*," *postmedieval* 9, no.2 (2018): 147–60, for a more recent development of this argument in relation to the ending of Jean's *Roman.* For analyses of the influence of both *De Planctu* and *Roman de la Rose* on Gower's notions of sexuality and language in the *Mirour* and the *Confessio*, see Watt, *Amoral Gower*, especially, chapters 1 and 2, and Yeager, "John Gower's French." Yeager remarks that "the courtly world initiated by the *Roman de la Rose* seldom seems far from Gower's mind . . . Nothing is truly borrowed from the *Roman* into the *Mirour*, but its allegory stands conspicuously behind significant characters from the *Mirour*, like Reson, Paour and Foldelit. Because the *Mirour* is written in French, the pressure is that much stronger" (143).

where "Alan too associates hermaphroditism with various modalities of writing."[19] This association is also evident in Jean de Meun's *Roman*: "Through Jean's agency, by the end of the High Middle Ages hermaphroditism and the homosexuality with which it was associated had come to be employed as signs of creative freedom."[20] The *Roman de la Rose*, Rollo has shown, revels in, rather than critiques, both gender and language ambiguity.[21] Unlike Jean de Meun, Gower was suspicious of the kind of creative freedom and ambiguity Jean revels in and, through his *Mirour*, tries to distance himself from Jean's "hermaphroditic poetics."

Gower's distancing, however, does not turn out to be an outright rejection of this poetics. In enacting his self-discipline in order to reinvent or recreate himself as a different type of author, he does so by still depending on queer associations and queer ambiguities. In *Chaucer's (Anti-)Eroticisms and the Queer Middle Ages*, Tison Pugh has examined the queer play in courtly love relationships and has argued that in numerous texts the courtly lady can be read as "a man or [as] a hermaphroditic figure capable of inhabiting masculine and feminine genders simultaneously."[22] In the last part of the *Mirour*, the Virgin Mary, we will see, becomes Gower's courtly lady and functions as a kind of hermaphroditic figure who authorizes a different kind of

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[19] It should be noted that while most critics agree that Alain decries gender and grammar ambiguity, Rollo, *Kiss My Relics*, argues that he is an "exuberant practitioner" of "venereal discourse" and ultimately does not critique such discourse (215 and 87–88).

[20] Rollo, *Kiss My Relics*, 216.

[21] For analyses of the relationship between sexuality and writing in the *Roman de la Rose*, see also Simon Gaunt, "Bel Acueil and the Improper Allegory of the *Roman de la Rose*," *New Medieval Literatures* 2 (1998): 65–93. For an influential study of language and gender in Alain's *De Planctu*, see Jan Ziolkowski, *Alain of Lille's Grammar of Sex: The Meaning of Grammar to a Twelfth-Century Intellectual* (Cambridge, MA: Medieval Academy of America, 1985).

[22] Tison Pugh, *Chaucer's (Anti-)Eroticisms and the Queer Middle Ages* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2014), 40.

hermaphroditic poetics, one that attempts to construct male and female not as opposites but as co-existing and stable concepts. Thus, through his turn to the Virgin Mary, Gower constructs a different kind of authorial voice, one that does not completely give up but reorients its queer underpinnings.

In the following pages, I will first analyze Gower's identification of linguistic with sexual indeterminacies and both of them with sin by examining the origin of the "hermaphroditic" daughters, the passage that describes them, and the section on the Sins, particularly Wantonness, the sin he later confesses to, and the Virtues. This analysis will demonstrate, first, that Gower is deeply aware of being implicated, as a writer, in exploiting the ambiguities of language and gender and, second, that his denunciation of these ambiguities as sinful is meant to distance his poetics from Alain's and Jean's "hermaphroditic" poetics. It is also meant to set the stage for his confession about his gender-ambiguous courtly poetic past, a confession through which Gower explicitly enacts in a pointedly personal way his capacity for self-discipline. Once Gower distances himself from Alain and Jean and once he assures the reader that he has given up sinful ambiguities, he is able to return to such indeterminacies with a difference. In the last section of this article, we will see that rather than completely renouncing the queerness of bodies and language, as he purports to do in his confession, Gower develops a different kind of hermaphroditic poetics. In his life of the Virgin Mary, Gower's rhetoric relies on the notion that, like Salmacis and Hermaphroditus, the courtly and the moralistic, female and male, are ultimately and irremediably intertwined in his poetry and in his authorial persona.

Queer Indeterminacies

Studies of medieval literature and culture through the lens of queer theory have often centered on

the power of queerness, as Carolyn Dinshaw has put it, to "[knock] signifiers loose," that is, to

reveal the indeterminacy and instability of language.[23] Queer theory, in other words, exposes the

tenuous relation between signifier and signified.[24] This tenuous relation results in two seemingly

contradictory possibilities. On the one hand, it makes it difficult for a writer to control meaning

at all times. On the other hand, it also suggests that at certain points, within a given discourse,

there are gaps and opportunities for the writer to exert some control, or, as Judith Butler might

put it, to resignify.[25]

 The problem of language's indeterminacy and of the author's power of signification is a

central concern from the beginning of the *Mirour*.[26] The poem starts by drawing attention to sin's

deceitfulness—we are told that sin's love is false ("peché, dont l'amour est fals," 3) and

indirectly pointing to the author's ability to use language deceitfully; Gower promises that his

poem will not tell about an "imaginary matter": "Ce n'est pas chose controvée, / Dont pense

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[23] Dinshaw, *Getting Medieval*, 39.

[24] Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality* and its argument about the links between sex and the production of "truth" in Western culture is foundational to queer theory. Judith Butler's theories about sex, gender, and performativity as developed especially in *Gender Trouble* and *Bodies that Matter* are also foundational to queer theory.

[25] Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 138. As Butler famously argues, "signification is not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition that both conceals itself and enforces its rules" (145). It is in the gaps between the repetitions that resignification may occur.

[26] It should be noted that the one manuscript we have of the *Mirour* is missing a number of leaves. Yeager, in "John Gower's French," has calculated that we may have lost around 4,000 lines of the poem, most from missing leaves at the beginning and at the end of the poem, and a smaller number of them from a few missing leaves in middle sections of the manuscript (139–40).

affaire ma ditée" (it is no imaginary matter my poem intends to treat, 1314). By introducing what he will do in negative terms—he will *not* tell something imaginary but will narrate it "tout voirement" (very truthfully, 15)—he is reminding us that, in fact, he does have the power to tell something imaginary and that, therefore, the reader might have reason to doubt his "truthfulness." Significantly too, Gower sets up his true words in a binary relation against the deceitfulness of the Sins:

> Ainz vuill conter tout voirement
>
> Coment les filles du Pecché
>
> Font que tous sont enamouré
>
> Par leur deceipte vilement. (15–18)

(Rather I want to tell very truthfully what the daughters of Sin do to make everyone love them for their vile deceit.)

The poet asks us to take him at his word, but does so by reminding us, to paraphrase Copeland, of his capacity to distort the word.

Right after signaling his awareness of the indeterminacy of language, Gower also presents the problem of gender indeterminacy. When he introduces Satan only sixty lines into the *Mirour*, it immediately becomes clear that there is something queer about Satan. In Gower's poem, Satan, who is identified as male, gives birth to Sin; as Zarins has put it, he acts as "a non-binary parent who nurtures his offspring with maternal care."[27] Satan's queerness, moreover, is inherited by his offspring. While Death, "La Mort," is grammatically feminine in French, she is also the father of the Seven Deadly Sins, conceived upon Sin.[28] Similarly, as Watt notes, in these

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[27] Zarins, "Intersex," 51.

[28] See Zarins, "Intersex," 32–33, and Watt, *Amoral Gower*, 27.

early lines we also read about "a feminine *Char* (Flesh) sighing for love of the devil's daughter

Peché (Sin; this noun is normally masculine)."[29] Such queerings also take place later in the poem

with other allegorical figures. Specific sins whose names are traditionally feminine in Anglo-

Norman acquire masculine traits or masculine grammatical markers and vice versa. Examples of

gender play appear even in the section on the virtues, a point I will return to below.[30] As Hsy has

observed, "Throughout the poem, grammatical gender oscillates erratically, and the alignment

between assigned gender and gender presentation are [sic] fluid."[31] Satan's gender and that of his

offspring are indeterminate.

Satan's language is, similarly, duplicitous, as Gower emphasizes in his depiction of the

Fall. His temptation of Eve hinges on two related tricks that are also evident later on in the

passage on the "hermaphroditic" characteristics of the Sins and throughout the poem: the first

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[29] Watt, *Amoral Gower*, 27.

[30] For instance, Reason, a feminine noun, becomes the husband of the Seven Virtues. See Hsy, "Linguistic Entrapment," 200.

[31] Hsy, "Linguistic Entrapment," 200. G. C. Macaulay (*The Works of John Gower: The French Works*), the *Mirour*'s first and only editor, posits that these gender incongruities suggest that by the time Gower wrote the *Mirour*, "the feeling for gender had to some extent worn away in England," xvii. Rejecting this argument Watt, *Amoral Gower*, has contended that someone "as educated as Gower," someone, she notes, well acquainted with Alain de Lille's work (and, we should add in this context, with the *Roman de la Rose*), and someone who plays with gender in other contexts, would be unlikely to have lost such a 'feeling'" (28). Watt further supports her argument through an analysis of Gower's play with gender in Middle English in the "Tale of Iphis and Iante" in the *Confessio*. I agree with Watt and would add that two significant lines in the Prologue to the *Confessio* offer further support for this observation: "For Senne of his coundicioun / Is moder of divisioun" (1029–30). In these lines "his" refers back to Sin, even though Sin is not the father but the *mother* of division (even if "his" was sometimes neutral in Middle English, it is still significant that Gower would refer back to the mother by means of the neutral, not the feminine, pronoun). If it is hard to imagine Gower "losing the feeling for gender" in Middle English, it is similarly hard to imagine that he would lose it in Anglo-Norman. It seems more plausible to posit that his feeling for gender is queer in relation to Sin, whether or not the specific language he writes in uses grammatical gender.

one reveals the problem of distinguishing between surface and substance and the second one exposes the duplicity of language. In order to tempt Eve, Satan first changes his appearance or surface. Using two significant words that anticipate his description of the daughters of the Deadly Sins, Gower refers to Satan's "semblance" (128) and writes that he adopts the "forme d'un serpent" (129). Subsequently, in a display of "infernal rhetoric," as Kurt Olsson commenting on this scene has aptly put it, he also conjures up false appearances through language.[32] Creating a false narrative that relies on appearances, Satan tells ("conta," 136) Eve a false story: she should eat of the fruit that "perest benoit" (*seems* blessed, 138, my italics), because it will enable her to know good and evil. Eve is seduced by the form of the serpent and by the deceitful description of the apple's seemingly virtuous properties. Significantly, Eve does not realize that there is a pun in "perest," a verb that evokes "perir" or "perer," which can mean to kill, perish, die.[33] The apple appears to be blessed and will also be the reason she and Adam will die. Thus Gower links the duplicity of language with the Fall, aligning himself with the medieval belief, most prominently and influentially developed by Augustine, that the indeterminacy of language is a result of the Fall.[34] That the woman is the first to fall for such tricks helps construct a link between women, or femininity, surface, and deceit. Furthermore, the

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[32] Kurt Olsson, "The Cardinal Virtues and the Structure of John Gower's *Speculum Meditantis*," *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 7 (1977), 121.

[33] Anglo-Norman Dictionary (http://www.anglo-norman.net/, accessed July 3, 2018).

[34] For an analysis of the original theological debates about this problem and its late medieval manifestations in some literary works, see John Fyler, *Language and the Declining World in Chaucer, Dante and Jean de Meun* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). See also Dinshaw's analysis of these debates in relation to the Pardoner in *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1990), chapter 6, titled "Eunuch Hermeneutics."

association between deceitfulness and a queer figure like Satan serves as a first warning against

what Gower and the long tradition that preceded and influenced him see as the deceitfulness of

queer bodies.[35] A further implication to be drawn at this point is that a man or a woman who

deceives is, in a sense, like Satan, queer. Similarly, a man who, like Eve, lets himself be deceived

becomes woman-like.

The depiction of Satan and the temptation of Eve thus introduce key concerns that

illuminate the passage on the intersexual sins. Let us return to the passage that describes the

daughters of the Deadly Sins as intersex and analyze these key concerns in greater depth:

> Entendre devetz tout avant,
>
> Tous ceux dont vous irray contant,
>
> Comme puis orretz l'estoire dite,
>
> Naiscont du merveillous semblant;
>
> Car de nature a leur naiscant
>
> Trestous sont mostre hermaphrodite;
>
> Sicome le livre m'en recite,
>
> Ce sont quant double forme habite
>
> Femelle et madle en un enfant:
>
> Si noun de femme les endite,
>
> Les filles dont je vous endite
>
> Sont auci homme nepourquant. (1021–32)

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[35] The association of deceitfulness with hermaphrodites has been pointed out by numerous scholars. See, for instance, Joan Cadden, *Meanings of Sex Difference in the Middle Ages: Medicine, Science, and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), who has observed that medieval writings usually argue that "[hermaphroditic] bodies are misleading and so are their mores"; "they are deceitful; they are liars (212–13). See also Rowland, 149.

Immediately drawing our attention to language, this passage starts by emphasizing the importance of understanding ("entendre") what Gower is about to tell us ("irray contant"). The accuracy or truthfulness of the language he will use in his narrative (his own authoritativeness), though, is undermined and called into question by some of his subsequent word choices, choices that remind us of the author's, to use Copeland's words, "capacity to distort." Gower indicates that we will hear more about their story later on ("Comme puis orretz l'estoire dite"). Two words in this line are significant: "estoire," which means both history and story, and "orretz." While there was not a clear line between history and story in the Middle Ages, "estoire" raises the question of whether Gower's story is history or fiction. "Orretz" is significant for a related reason. Copeland has observed that one of the dangers of rhetoric is that it depends on belief: "oratory produces only belief based on provisional appearances, not conviction based on knowledge of truth."[36] In this context, "orretz" in line 1023 evokes oratory and amounts to a request that, as we hear the story told, we believe Gower the author. Gower's recognition that the reader may doubt the veracity of his account becomes even more explicit when he notes that his understanding of intersex comes from a book: "Sicome le livre m'en recite." While alluding to books as sources was a common way for medieval writers to authorize themselves, in this case, the authority of the book is uncertain: we are told neither the name of the author, nor the title of the book. Gower implies that he has not seen actual intersexual bodies and has to depend on "believing" the book. One must assume that the book shows, to echo Copeland again, "conviction based on knowledge of truth," but, with regard to these "provisional appearances," all we have, as readers or listeners, is Gower's word.

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[36] Copeland, "The Pardoner's Body," 151.

Gower's awareness of the constructedness of language and thus of his own authority and of his readers' dependence on his assurances that he is telling the truth also explain the repetition of the verb "endite" in lines 1030–31. According to the online Anglo-Norman Dictionary: "enditer" can mean to dictate; to compose, write; to expound, explain; to tell, teach; to indicate, show; to indict, bring a charge against.[37] In a note on these lines, Macaulay observes that the first "'enditer' is employed in an unusual sense" and translates the line as "If I lay upon them female names."[38] The second instance of "enditer" evokes more clearly the traditional sense: to compose, to write. Whether in its usual or unusual sense, "enditer" draws attention to the author's power to "compose," and to create, as it were, the creatures through the act of naming them, by "laying a name on them."

As he draws attention to the power of language and of the author to create, Gower also notes the limitations of this power. Remarking that he has to choose one gender to refer to the daughters, even though they are both female and male at the same time, he implies that language or grammar does not allow him to refer to their non-binary selves. The word "semblant" is also key here. The creatures, Gower notes, have a "merveillous semblant" (1024). In addition to "appearance," Wilson's translation, "semblant" can also mean "likeness, pretence, show, disguise, apparition." "Semblant" introduces a sense of uncertainty, the suggestion that we may not be able to ascertain whether what we see reveals or matches the supposed inner core. If the creatures' "semblant" is both male and female, what are they behind their "semblant"? Gower's confusion is illuminated by Butler's theory about the ontology of gender. Butler has argued that

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[37] Anglo-Norman Dictionary (http://www.anglo-norman.net/, accessed August 2, 2018).

[38] Macaulay, *The Works of John Gower: The French Works*, 397. Wilson's translation is very similar: "if I lay on them the name female."

gender "produce[s] the appearance of substance, the illusion of a natural sort of being."[39] As she further explains, "words, acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance but produce this *on the surface* of the body."[40] Gender, in Butler's view, serves to construct the illusion that an inner and outer binary constitutes the self. Even sex, in the sense of physical markers, are to Butler just on the surface of the body and do not reveal an inner core but participate in the same discursive construction as gender. The mention of "semblant" in the lines on the "hermaphroditic" figures alludes to an opposition between an inner core and an outer surface (their "semblant"). But, following Butler, and as "semblant" suggests, we may even wonder whether an inner core exists.

The word "semblant" also foreshadows the allegorical figure of Faus Semblant in Gower's poem and in the *Roman de la Rose*, whose gender in both cases is ambiguous as well.[41] In her analysis of the reference to Faus Semblant's clothes in lines 11185−88 of the *Roman de la Rose*, Dinshaw, reminding us of Butler's questioning of the existence of an inner core, argues that "there is nothing underneath those clothes but a consuming fraud."[42] Gower similarly raises doubts about the substance of the hermaphroditic figures and, in doing so, raises doubts about the relationship between the outward expression of gender and a supposed inner core. If the

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[39] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 33.

[40] Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 136.

[41] Faus Semblant's gender ambiguity and its connection with Chaucer's Pardoner has been analyzed by several critics. Comparing Faus Semblant to the Pardoner, for instance, Copeland has argued that both "are products of the metaphorical tradition of rhetoric as unregulated sexuality" (149). See also Rowland, 148–49, and Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics*, 169–75.

[42] Dinshaw, *Chaucer's Sexual Poetics,* 175.

ambiguous gender of the allegorical Sins raises questions about what lies beneath the surface, is it possible that human bodies that are apparently unambiguously male or female also fail to match some inner core?

Further doubts are raised about the relationship between surface and core and between the signifier and the signified by the word "mostre" in line 1026 ("Trestous sont mostre hermaphrodite"). Classifying these hermaphroditic figures as monsters is conventional in a medieval context, but it also points to language.[43] Critics such as Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and David Williams have argued that monsters represent a kind of crisis of signification, reminding us of the instability inherent in the relationship between sign and signified.[44] As Williams puts it, "the monstrosity of a human figure with three heads or a tree with the power of speech functions to upset the mental expectations about the relation of the sign to what it is supposed to signify and to underscore the element of the arbitrary in the relation of the two."[45] In this sense, "monstre" echoes the meaning of "semblant," for, in addition to "monster," the word can also mean "act of displaying, showing." It also harkens back to the description of Temptation's successful strategy to seduce the Flesh. Not only does Temptation use sweet words (505–16), but she also "moustra" (shows) tempting delights (693–95). Furthermore, as Cohen has argued,

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[43] The view of hermaphrodites as monsters goes as far back in the Middle Ages as Augustine and Isidore of Seville but is also evident in classical times. See, for instance, Rowland, 144–45 and Leah DeVun, "The Jesus Hermaphrodite: Science and Sex Difference in Premodern Europe," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 69, no.2 (2008): 197–98.

[44] Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, "Monster Culture (Seven Theses)," in *Monster Theory*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 325. David A. Williams, *Deformed Discourse: The Function of the Monster in Mediaeval Thought and Literature* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1996).

[45] Williams, *Deformed Discourse*, 5.

The monstrous body is pure culture. A construct and a projection, the monster exists only

to be read: the *monstrum* is etymologically 'that which reveals,' 'that which warns,' a

glyph that seeks a hierophant. Like a letter on the page, the monster signifies something

other than itself: it is always a displacement.[46]

Gower's "hermaphroditic" figures similarly suggest displacement: if he calls them one thing,

they are also another: "Si noun de fem*m*e les endite, / Les filles dont je vous endite / Sont auci

hom*m*e nepourquant" (1030–32). Language forces him to choose between just two nouns,

"femme" and "homme," but neither one matches the signified. Alain laments in *De Planctu* that

talking or writing about hermaphrodites can only take place through the perversion of "natural"

grammar: "The man who is made into a woman blackens the honor of his sex and the art of

magical Venus turns him into a hermaphrodite. He is subject and predicate, he in himself

displays a double termination, he amplifies the rules of grammar to excess" (174).[47] Gower's

allegorical figures similarly defy the rules of language and grammar and point to their limits. We

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[46] Cohen, "Monster Culture," 4.

[47] Translation by Rollo, *Kiss My Relics*, 84–85. The original text is as follows: "Femina vir factus sexus denigrat honorem, / Ars magice Veneris hermaphroditat eum / Predicat et subicit, fit duplex terminus idem, / Grammatice leges ampliat ille nimis" " (1.1720) in Alain de Lille, "De Planctu Naturae," ed. Nikolaus M. Häring, *Studi medievali*, series 3, 19 (1978): 797–879. Commenting on this passage Cary J. Nederman, and Jacqui True in "The Third Sex: The Idea of the Hermaphrodite in Twelfth-Century Europe," (*Journal of the History of Sexuality* 6, no. 4 [1996]: 497–517), observe that to Alain, "some men are so womanly that they can be classified for the purposes of grammar as neither one nor the other" (509). Hence, to talk about them one would need to create a neologism or a barbarism, which to him signals the decay of language. Alain then conceives of the hermaphrodite, as Nederman and True put it, "as a challenge to good grammar" (509). Alain here is using the term "hermaphrodite" in the sense of "homosexual." By "hermaphrodite," Gower at this point, unlike Alain, clearly means the Ovidian sense in the story of Hermaphroditus, that is, an intersexual person with male (Hermaphroditus) and female (Salmacis) genitals.

do not know how to read them, or, at best, we are, as in the case of Temptation's "moustra," misled into a misreading.

By associating the "hermaphroditic" figures with deceit, as mentioned above, Gower is participating in a long tradition, but he takes this tradition further, reflecting on his own potential as an author to, like the "hermaphroditic monsters," be deceptive and indeterminate. Even as he indicates that he is aware of the limitations of language and thus of his power as an author, his construction of a link among gender, deceit, and language emphasizes his awareness of his own power as an author to deceive. By warning us against this link, he attempts to prove that he is reliable: unlike the Sins, he suggests, he will tell the truth; unlike Jean de Meun, he will not revel in the kind of ambiguity deployed in the *Roman de la Rose*.

From Queer indeterminacies to Queer Desires

Language and gender indeterminacy are also central to Gower's detailed and lengthy account, at almost 9,000 lines (1057–10032), about each of the Deadly Sins and their hermaphroditic children, or subspecies of sin. While, as Edwin Craun has shown, Sins of the Tongue, sins that have to do with deviant and deceitful speech, were often listed separately from other sins in pastoral literature, it is significant that Gower embeds them in each of the traditional Seven Deadly Sins.[48] In doing so, he attributes a greater pervasiveness to the problem of language. As in his introduction of Satan and of the origin of the Sins, this problem is associated with gender ambiguity as well, a problem that is also shown to be pervasive among the Sins. Significantly, though, queer ambiguities are most acutely present in the last sin he writes about, Wantonness.

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[48] Edwin Craun reviews the two main ways medieval pastoral texts incorporated Sins of the Tongue in chapter 1 of *Lies, Slander, and Obscenity in Medieval English Literature: Pastoral Rhetoric and the Deviant Speaker* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Even more significantly, Gower links Wantonness to sodomy or queer desires. In the following pages, we will see why he associates sodomy with the one sin that he later explicitly names in his confession as a sin he committed.

Language and gender are also explored, though not as insistently, in the following, slightly less lengthy, discussion of the Virtues, their offspring and servants (10033–18420).[49] The section on the Virtues draws attention to the virtuous use of language and often, though not always, presents gender in a traditional binary way, but this depiction of language and gender, we will see, still reveals queer connotations. Following his mirroring structure, Gower's examination of the Virtues ends with the opposite of Wantonness: Hard Life. My close examination below of both the section on Wantonness and the one on Hard Life will unlock the significance and queer implications of Gower's confession, his explicit act of self-disciplining before he turns to the Virgin Mary.

Before focusing on Wantonness, I will first briefly discuss Gower's Sins in order to establish the preceding context and thus the significance and resonance of Gower's description of the Sin. Out of a total of thirty-five offspring from the Seven Deadly Sins, sixteen are explicitly related to language (among these, some explore language more fully than others) and seven are associated with falsehood or doubleness. Gower starts his narrative about the Sins with Pride and her first daughter, Hypocrisy, a figure who, reminding us of the description of the "hermaphroditic" Sins, deceives people by her appearance (1064–65) and also by her misuse of words: she makes up fantasies and her preaching and praying distance her from, rather than bring

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[49] The length of these sections is significant, especially, when compared to the other two major parts of the poem. The first part of the *Mirour*, which includes the sections on the Sins and the Virtues, is more than 17,000 lines long and is by far the lengthiest one in the poem. The second major part of the poem, a critique of the estates, is about half as long, close to 9,000 lines, and the third part, the life of the Virgin Mary, is even shorter at fewer than 2,500 lines.

her closer to, God because her words do not match her heart (1062–63). All the other daughters of Pride (Vainglory, Arrogance, Boasting, and Disobedience) also exemplify the relation between language and sin. Even their companions manifest such a relationship: Flattery, companion to Vainglory, is described as a "soubtil enchanteour" (1382) who makes everyone "croire" (believe) that they are better than they are (1384–86) and is also called a "mençongere" or liar (1411).

Five of Avarice's daughters are also associated with language: Covetousness, Rapine, Usury, Simony, and Stinginess.[50] So are four of Envy's and Lechery's offspring: Detraction, Joy-For-Others' Grief, Supplanting, and False Semblance in the case of Envy; Fornication, Rape, Adultery, and Wantonness in the case of Lechery. Finally, two of Anger's offspring, Contention and Hatred, two of Gluttony's offspring, Delicacy and Drunkenness, and one of Sloth's offspring, Tenderness, are also associated with language and/or deceit.[51] These Sins also have numerous servants who use language dishonestly. For instance, Covetousness is served by Accusation, Subtlety, Perjury, Cheating, and Ingratitude. Among Disobedience's numerous

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[50] As an instance of Avarice's daughters' association with language, Stinginess is said to preach ("sermone") and exhort ("enhorte") those who serve her in order to persuade others to be stingy (7501–08 and 7513–18). While not specifically related to language, Rapine and Usury rely on deceit and fraud.

[51] The slothful use verbal excuses to keep doing nothing and Tenderness "si et trop feinte / Et du petit fait sa compleinte" (pretends a great deal and complains of little things, 5296–97). In the case of Gluttony, while not explicitly alluding to language, the lines about Delicacy point to his concern about form (appearance) versus substance (or truth): the man taken by Delicacy "De jun la fourme guardera, / De gule et la matière tient" (keeps the form of fasting, he keeps the substance of gluttony, 7859–60); also, Gower points out, Delicacy is deceitful (7797–80). In his comment on Drunkenness, he notes that Drunkenness "Latin fait parler et romace / Au laie gent, et au clergoun / Tolt de latin la remembrance" (causes laymen to speak Latin as well as vernacular, and makes clerics forget their Latin, 8149–52). Like hermaphroditic figures, laymen who are drunk speak with a double tongue, Latin and vernacular, while clerics, who are expected to use both languages (here the doubleness is not negatively portrayed), only use one.

servants are Murmur, Blasphemy, Contradiction, Spite, or Disdain.[52] For another example, Detraction, daughter of Envy, is served by Malebouche, Vituperation, Reproof, and Defamation.

Not only are the daughters of the Deadly Sins associated with language and deceit, but at several points, Gower reminds us that they are intersex as well, thus linking all three: gender ambiguity, language, and deception. For instance, Presumption, a companion to Arrogance (Pride's offspring), is described looking at herself in a mirror and thinking "Veoir dedeinz son filz ou file" (to see her son or daughter, 1567): if she can see either one in the mirror, the line implies, her appearance could be identified with either gender. False-semblance, Envy's fifth daughter (3517ff), as Hsy has noted, is grammatically masculine and yet "is described as if female-bodied."[53] Doubleness is also evident on her face though the doubleness is not gendered in this case: "Du Fals semblant la bele chere / Odibles est et semble chiere" (The fair countenance of False-semblant is hateful and seems dear, 3493–94). The theme of doubleness is emphasized also through his/her companion, Two-tongued (3517–3648). Gower here also constructs a binary relation between inner core and outer appearance: referring to the sinner who follows False-semblant, he notes that "Car come pule fait semblant d'amy / Apertement, tant pulu vous dy / Qu'il ad covert sa tricherie" (the more he appears openly to be a friend, all the more [I tell you] has he concealed his treachery, 3484–86), and also, later on, "Du bien parole en mal pensant" (She speaks of good while thinking evil, 3495). As mentioned above, medieval Christian theologians and writers saw the Fall as the point at which word and thing started to diverge. As John Fyler explains, "After the Fall . . . speech becomes capable of sophistry and

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[52] Spite, for instance, "dist maintes folours" (relates many follies, 2154), while Disdain "en toutez courtz / Parole et fait tout a rebours, / N'agarde a ce que Resoun dist" (speaks in all courts and does everything backwards, paying no attention to what Reason says, 2155–57)

[53] Hsy, "Linguistic Entrapment," 200.

lying, and names manifest fallen duplicity."[54] In his analysis of the Sins Gower continues to associate linguistic duplicity with gender duplicity.

Gower's insistent articulation of links between gender and language indeterminacy in his analysis of the Sins is also characteristic of his queer characterization of Foldelit or Wantonness, the last Sin he writes about, but this Sin also introduces an additional queer element, sodomy, in order to forcefully condemn it. In doing so, Gower preemptively tries to distance himself from any sodomitical implications one might draw from his confession later on that he committed the sin of Wantonness as he engaged in queer ambiguities in his courtly poetry and practices.

Gower's depiction of Wantonness takes 443 lines, more than the analysis of any of the other four of Lechery's daughters (Fornication, Rape, Adultery, and Incest), and starts by focusing on the Sin's gender ambiguity.[55] According to Gower, everyone is wanton "En fait, en penser et en dit" (in deed, in thought, and in word, 9197). It is a common sin that afflicts both genders. More importantly, it erases the constructed differences between men and women making them indistinguishable, or, in other words, non-binary or queer. Wanton men act like women: wanton women deck themselves with numerous adornments (9280–83) and sing "chançonettes" or little songs about wanton love to attract men (9284–88). Similarly, wanton men adorn themselves, sing carols, and talk constantly about love to attract women (9361–72). When others speak "Du bien, d'onour, d'oneste vie" (of good, honor, or honest life, 9399), the

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[54] Fyler, *Language and the Declining World*, 28.

[55] Adultery takes 335 lines, Fornication 47, Rape 83, and Incest 107. Of these four, Rape is explicitly related to the deceitful use of language. The rapist is said to be more eloquent than Tully; he utters false oaths and deceives virgins with slyly contrived words (8677–88 list complete set of lines). Adultery and Incest are mostly associated with guile and deceit and are explained in terms of acts, rather than language, while the emphasis in the lines on Fornication is on carnal delight.

wanton lover changes the subject and tells tales of "leccherie" (9402) and "puterie" or whoredom (9407). In these lines, Wantonness' ability to control language and use it successfully for deceitful purposes resonates with Gower's reflections in the poem on the power of the author to construct, create, and thus potentially deceive.

Gower's discussion of Wantonness, furthermore, introduces the specter of sodomy, a specter that will also haunt his own confession. The reference to sodomy, I argue, becomes necessary for Gower to show his capacity for self-restraint not just in terms of queer indeterminacies, but, specifically, with regard to queer desires. His first reference to sodomy in the section on Wantonness is somewhat indirect: "Si q'il sovent deinz les ridelles / Les taste si soient femmelles, / Cest un solas don't se rejoye" (Often he [a man led by Wantonness] touches them in the folds to 'confirm' that they are female; this is a solace he enjoys, 9382–84). Denouncing wanton men who pursue women, these lines betray an anxiety that men may look like women in their "fancy clothes" and that, therefore, they may be gender ambiguous. Otherwise, why would the wanton man need to confirm that those who appear to be or are dressed as women are actually female by touching them "in the folds"? There is also a suggestion here that, as Butler's theory of gender performativity reveals, gender is so unstable, so superficial and unrelated to an assumed inner core, that once one puts on clothes that supposedly belong to another gender, one's assumed inner core is also changed. This, in turn, hints at the absence of a fixed inner core. But there is still more to these lines: they also point to the problem of queer sexual desires. The solace enjoyed by the man who touches the folds could be imagined as heterosexual (if he is looking to touch a woman), homosexual (if he is hoping to find a man underneath), or, more indeterminately, queer (if he is enjoying the gender ambiguity communicated by fancy clothes that blur the line between men and women).

The problem of sodomy is raised explicitly about a hundred lines later in terms that equate linguistic restraint with sexual restraint. It is important to note here that any of the sins could, arguably, have been associated with sodomy. For, as noted by numerous critics, intersexuality or "hermaphroditism," a feature of all of the daughters of the Deadly Sins, was often associated with homosexuality in the Middle Ages, including by Alain de Lille himself.[56] However, apart from a passing allusion to sodomy in relation to Idleness, Gower only refers to and elaborates on sodomy in relation to Wantonness.[57] In a passage reminiscent of Alain's *De Planctu*, Gower notes that Nature complains that those who are wanton do, "Comme jadys firont ly nounseint / En la Cité de Sodomie" (as the sinners did of old in the city of Sodom, 9509–10). He then goes on to call this sin "C'est celle horrible leccherie / En quelle toute ordure meint / Dieu et nature le desfie" (This horrible lechery dwells in all filth; God and nature detest it, 9512–14). In an explicit moment of linguistic self-disciplining that implies also a fear that rhetorical excess can be equated with sexual excess, he states that he does not dare say more about it because shame and reason restrain him: "Mais plus parler n'en ose mie, / Car honte et resoun me

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[56] Commenting on 1.13–18 of *De Planctu Naturae* Rollo argues that Alain suggests that "it is the homosexual male who assumes the verbal guise of Hermaphroditus" (84). As John Boswell, "Dante and the Sodomites" *Dante Studies* 112 (1994): 63–76, puts it, "Many medieval poems equate 'homosexual' with 'hermaphrodite' apparently because the sexual behavior associated with one gender is located in the body of the other" (71). Boswell made a similar observation in *Christianity, Social Tolerance, and Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 375–76, n. 50.

[57] In his analysis of Idleness, Gower states that when one is idle, the flesh takes over and "does not listen to God or to the world" (5849). This fleshly desire turns out to be sodomitical: "Holy Jeremiah, in this connection, says that Idleness with her contempt caused Sodom to commit its offense" (5854–56). There is one other mention of sodomy in the poem, a mention that is even more brief. Toward the end of the second part of the poem, after discussing the estates, Gower asks where evil comes from and, after mentioning the fall of Adam in the context of pride, he writes that "Fire devoured Sodom" (27081), implying that pride also has to do with sodomy.

restreeint" (9515–16). Distancing himself from and denouncing queer desires, Gower enacts self-restraint both rhetorically and in terms of gender. This amounts to a preemptive move that lays the groundwork for the reader to believe his confession and to read the queer connotations in his turn to the Virgin in a different light than we may read Jean's "hermaphroditic poetics."

While the Sins revel in deceit and doubleness, the Virtues, in Gower's telling are set up as their binary opposite: they represent oneness and truth. The discussion about the Virtues is set up as a mirror to the discussion on the Sins—each Sin has a corresponding Virtue. The mirroring is not always exact, though. Thus the exploration of language is relatively less emphasized in the section on the Virtues. For instance, although language is a central concern in relation to the Sin of Avarice, it is not explored in the section on Generosity, its virtuous counterpart. Nevertheless, Gower does set up the overlap of language and truth as the distinguishing feature of many Virtues: of the thirty-five offspring of the Virtues, at least fifteen are associated to some extent with the truthful use of language.[58]

One way in which Gower manifests this association is through the repeated mention of the virtuous overlap between thought and word or thought, word, and deed. At the wedding of Reason to the Seven Virtues, for instance, the minstrels are "Bon pesement, Bon fait, Bon dit" (Good Thought, Good Word, and Good Deed, 10124). Similarly, Gower emphasizes toward the beginning of this section that one should pray "Sanz parler curiousement / Et sanz nul double entendement / Du plain penser plain mot dirra / Car double lange dieus n'orra" (without contrived speaking, without double meaning, for God will not hearken to a double tongue,

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[58] The Virtues' offspring associated with language are the following: Devotion, Fear, Discretion and Modesty (Humility's offspring), Praise-of-Others and Goodwill (Charity's offspring); Knowledge (Prowess' offspring); Sobriety (Measure's offspring); Almsgiving, Largess, and Holy Purpose (Generosity's offspring); Good Care and Hard Life (Chastity's offspring).

10228–31). Another mention of the unity of the three is his description of Goodwill, one of the daughters of Charity, as "en son penser / Est bon, et qant vient au parler / Meillour, et puis qant vient a faire / Tresmeulx" (good in thought, better in word, and still better in deed, 13201–04).

Given his emphasis on "straight" meaning, we would expect the Virtues to be straight from a gender perspective as well. This is not always so, though. When writing about the Virtues, Gower has to negotiate the same grammatical challenge he dealt with in relation to the Sins: the grammatical gender of the nouns that name the Virtues sometimes does not match the gender associations he attempts to evoke in relation to those Virtues. This grammatical conundrum is particularly apparent in the case of Hard Life, opposite of Wantonness.

In his analysis of Chastity, the counterpart to Lechery, Gower elaborates on the notion that linguistic restraint equals sexual restraint. Hard Life, the last of this Virtue's five daughters, is explicitly set up in opposition to Wantonness and discussed as such. Nevertheless, the evils of succumbing to Wantonness are addressed also in relation to the other daughters, particularly Good Care (opposite of Fornication), the first of Chastity's daughters. As he starts to describe Good Care, Gower quickly turns to language: "Ly saint Apostre nous defent / De parler leccherousement; / Care le parler de ribaldie / Corrumpt les bonnes mours sovent" (The holy apostle forbids us to speak lecherously for ribald talk often corrupts good manners, 16609–12). There are also repeated warnings against wanton talk (especially, lines 16657–92) and wanton looks (16693–764), and we are told that the tongue needs to be watched by Good Care, who "N'ad point la goule chanterole / Pour dire ou chanter de luxure" (has not the throat to sing and talk of lechery, 16629). Gower inveighs against the "foldisour" (wanton talker, 16659) or "lechour" (16663) who tries to "Queinter" (with a pun perhaps on Middle English "queinte"), or adorn his stories of love, and whose "chançons" will turn to tears (16665–67). As we saw in the

analysis above, these warnings against Wantonness relate love and sexual desire to language, as the Sin is manifested through singing, talking, and listening. Loose talk equals loose sexual mores.

The description of Hard Life as the direct opposite of Wantonness is coded, partly, in gender terms—Aspre Vie is the masculine counterpart to Wantonness' femininity. Hard Life is insistently described in terms that evoke traditional masculine behaviors and avoid feminine connotations. The section on Hard Life starts as follows:

> [Aspre Vie] au fine force Leccherie
>
> Abat, et Chasteté supporte;
>
> La char si reddement chasti,
>
> Qe ja nui jour de sa partie
>
> Ne laist entrer dedeinz sa porte
>
> Le Foldelit q'au corps resorte. (17966–71)

([Hard Life] beats down Lechery with perfect strength and supports Chastity. So roughly does she chastise the flesh that, for its part, it never allows inside its door the Wantonness that returns to the body).

Words such as "force" or "reddement" evoke traditionally masculine behaviors.

The body who follows Hard Life, moreover, rejects all pleasures and abundance in order not to be stirred by delights (18001–24). It rejects anything soft (clothes, couch, a bed), because feeling softness leads to Wantonness (18037–54). Thus, Hard Life puts on a hair shirt and, generally, punishes the body ("Si tient le corps en grant despit" [She holds her body in great contempt], 18059–60) so that her soul may be loved by God. Again evoking the masculine, Hard Life is said to have two armors. One of them is "d'umble cuer oir sovent / De dieu sermon le

prechement, / Q'om dist de la seinte escripture" (to listen often and with humble heart to the

preaching of God's Word, 18091–93). He who takes the armor and learns from Hard Life "Du

Foldelit se puet defendre" (can defend himself from Wantonness, 18244). Even God's Word in

this section is presented as masculine; God's Word has

> . . . grant vigour,
>
> Et grant vertu deinz soy contient.
>
> Car par parole soul du nient
>
> Diewus siel et terre ove leur atour
>
> Tout les crea comme creatour. (18159–62)

(. . . great strength, and contains great virtue within itself. For God, by His Word alone, as

Creator, created heaven and earth.)

God's word, like Hard Life, is virile and strong. These masculine qualities set her up in contrast

with Wantonness' feminine behaviors. The feminine softness of Wantonness is disciplined by

the virile hardness of Hard Life, as the deceitfulness and doubleness of Wantonness is defeated

by the oneness of God's word.

     The apparently predominantly masculine characteristics of Hard Life and of God's Word

would reasonably lead us to expect that Gower's next step in his self-disciplining process, the

process through which he disavows his prior wanton tendencies, will be articulated in

unambiguously masculine terms. Significantly, however, as we will see in his turn to the Virgin

Mary, this is not the case. Despite Aspre Vie's predominantly masculine features, there is

something queer even about this Virtue. Indeed, Hard Life or "Aspre vie" is grammatically

feminine in Anglo-Norman and is therefore referred to as "she" throughout her description.

Aspre Vie's feminine grammatical gender is one indication, among others, that Gower's

exploration of the relationship between sin, gender, and language, does not lead him to construct his authorial persona and his poetics as unambiguously masculine; in fact, he conceives of both as an intertwining of feminine and masculine.

Gower's French Confessio and Reorientation

Right before turning to the final section of the *Mirour*, the Life of the Virgin Mary, and following his critique of the estates, Gower confesses his sins (approximately from lines 27289 to 27408). In this confession Gower seems to renounce his earlier (pre-*Mirour*) courtly poetry phase and the queer courtly language and practices associated with it. His poetic approach to the Life of the Virgin Mary, though, I will argue, suggests that he does not ultimately renounce such practices but reorients them, developing a different kind of queer poetics.

Although he admits to having committed "great sins" and "great wrongs" (27308) as well as all the Deadly Sins, Wantonness is the only sin Gower names and elaborates on (27365–70). He tells us when, how, and in what circumstances he committed this sin in an echo of the earlier description of Wantonness' queer behavior and activities:

> Jadis trestout m'abandonoie
>
> Au foldelit et veine joye,
>
> Dont ma vesture desguisay
>
> Et les fols ditz d'amours fesoie,
>
> Dont en chantant je carrolloie. (27337–41)

(In olden days I gave myself freely to wantonness and vain joy. I decked myself out in fancy clothes and composed foolish ditties, which I danced about singing.)

The problem of both language's duplicity and gender ambiguity are central here. Through the repetition of "fol" he draws a direct verbal link between wantonness, or "foldelit," and the foolishness of his poetry or "fols ditz" (notice also the alliterative "d" in "delit" and "ditz") More significantly, "fols" (foolish) is likely too a pun on "faulse," "faulce," or "faus" ("false" in Anglo-Norman).[59] Gower's earlier poetry, he laments, was not just foolish; it was also false. This "falseness" is further emphasized several lines later, when he admits he used to be "deceitful," in fact, "tant ay esté decevant, / Qe, s'il ne m'avra respite / Je n'ose prier tant ne qant" (so deceitful that, unless He has pardoned me, I dare not even pray, 27404–06).

The deceitfulness of Gower's courtly poetry was matched by the deceitfulness of his gender indeterminate or queer appearance. Gower "desguisay" (dressed) in "fancy clothes." Wilson translates "desguisay" as "decked myself," but the word comes from "deguiser" (or "desguiser"), which means not just adornment, but "disguise" as well.[60] In Copeland's words, "Style is the part of rhetoric that can be seen, and as such is always in danger of being considered merely deceptive surface."[61] There is, of course, a long tradition of associating "fancy clothes" and adornments with femininity, deceit, and with excessive rhetoric or style. This association, as Watt has shown, is also evident in Gower's work: "Images of colored or made-up faces combined with lying words haunt Gower's writing."[62] It is evident in Gower's confession as well and in his earlier depiction of the "wanton" man in his description of the Sin:

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[59] *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* (http://www.anglo-norman.net/ accessed June 25, 2019).

[60] *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* (http://www.anglo-norman.net/ accessed June 25, 2019).

[61] Copeland, "The Pardoner's Body," 146.

[62] Watt, *Amoral Gower*, 49. Copeland further writes that "stylistic excrescence allows the well-trained, masculine body to sink into effeminacy (not femininity), counterfeiting its proper

> Mais si la femme mette cure
>
> En foldelit, d'asses plue cure
>
> Cil homme qui par tout s'avance,
>
> Et fait disguiser sa vesture,
>
> Et ad bien basse la ceinture,
>
> Et sur tout ce carolle et cance
>
> Ove bien jolye contienance. (9361–67)

(But if a woman puts effort into wantonness, even more does a man when he decks himself out in fine clothes, wears his belt low, and above all carols and dances with a very merry countenance).

Like the "hermaphrodite" and "hermaphroditic" Sins, Gower as a wanton man had a double form: the outside (his disguise) and the form beneath the outside. His clothes made him queer.

Two types of fear then are expressed in Gower's confession: that a man might be confused with a woman, a gender anxiety, and that as a result of this confusion, or perhaps because of it, queer desires will be elicited, an anxiety about sodomy. Gower's confession and condemnation of his past inclination to wear "fancy clothes" also takes us back to his explicit condemnation of sodomy in relation to Wantonness (9509–14) and his explicit linguistic self-restraint. By the time we reach Gower's confession that he used to be wanton, we are reminded of his earlier discussion of the Sin and, therefore, the description of his lack of restraint in his courtly poetry and courtly practices is haunted by the sodomitical desires associated with Wantonness. Courtly lovers and poets with their fancy clothes and foolish ditties engage in

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virility"; thus, another common trope "uses the male body to identify an undisciplined rhetoric with transgressive sexuality" (147).

"excessive style," thus acting in feminine ways and provoking gender indeterminacies and even queer desires.[63]

Given Gower's association of courtly poetry with linguistic and "hermaphroditic" indeterminacies, it may seem that his apparent disavowal of courtly poetry in his confession also amounts to a rejection of "hermaphroditic" poetics. In confessing that he was "decevant" or deceitful in the past (27404), Gower tries to assure his readers that there is nothing "deceitful" about the section of the *Mirour* that follows his confession, the life of the Virgin. Renouncing his earlier tendencies, he promises that he will "change all that" ("tout cela je changeray"), asks for God's help to do so, and says he will sing a different song "Un autre chançon chanteray" (27342–48). This song will be "un chançon cordial" (a song of the heart, 27351). Yeager has argued about this moment that, "the narrator realizes that, for him, salvation can come only by reversing this sin—by turning, that is, his mortal *carole* into . . . a truer 'song of the heart' (MO line 27351), that is, into a prayer to the Virgin Mary."[64] In order for this song to be "truer," he indicates, it will model itself after the true language of the Virtues; it will not be double, for, as Gower states in line 10231, "God will not hearken to a double tongue" ("double lange dieus

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[63] The feminization of men in the context of courtly love and poetry has been the subject of numerous studies about medieval texts. For early studies on this topic, see for instance Elaine Tuttle Hansen, *Chaucer and the Fictions of Gender* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992) and E. Jane Burns, "Refashioning Courtly Love: Lancelot as Ladies' Man or Lady / Man," in *Constructing Medieval Sexuality*, ed. Karma Lochrie, Peggy McCracken, and James Schultz (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 111–34. For more recent studies, see, also on Chrétien de Troyes' *Lancelot*, Jeffrey Jerome Cohen, *Medieval Identity Machines* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), chapter 3, "Masoch/Lancelotism." Watt, *Amoral Gower*, also discusses instances in the *Confessio* when the excessive passion of love is portrayed as feminizing the male lover (for instance, see 70–71). For a more recent study that takes an explicitly intersexual perspective on courtly love dynamics, see Pugh, *Chaucer's (Anti-) Eroticisms and the Queer Middle Ages*.

[64] Yeager, "John Gower's French," 144.

n'orra"). But does Gower "change all that," as he promises to do by singing "from the heart"? Does he leave behind stylistic excess and gender ambiguity? Does his explicit rejection of the femininity and queerness of his earlier courtly poetry turn into an embrace of a "masculine" poetics? An examination of the figure of the Virgin in the *Mirour* suggests that this is not the case. While he reorients his poetry by changing its object of devotion from an earthly beloved to an earthly/divine Virgin Mary, he also keeps the form and its queer associations. His portrayal of Mary and his new poetics are less straight than seems to be promised.

Several critics have noticed Gower's use of *fin amour* language in his life of the Virgin. As Georgiana Donavin has observed, Gower's "characterization of Mary . . . imitates many of the *topoi* of *fin amour*. In Gower's *Mirour* Mary is a beautiful lady of much discretion and noble sentiment who is to be set above all others."[65] Writing about her birth, Gower states that she was St. Anne's "belle fille . . . du grace pure / Sur toute humeine creature" (beautiful daughter . . . of pure grace above all human creatures**,** 27653–55). At fourteen years of age, she is humble (e.g., 27695) and devoted only to God (27736–37). Gower, as Donavin also notes, invokes Mary as muse for his poem.[66] He asks her to help him conclude his work (27901–03) and also to place enough "sense" in his heart that he can recount her praise (27911–12). The language of *fin amour* plays a crucial and defining role too in the description of Mary's relationship with Jesus. As Matthew Irvin observes, "Gower uses the language of amorous love to depict the depth of Mary's and Christ's intimacy, and involves himself in this erotic language by praying to Mary as 'ma dame.' He offers her his service in a way familiar from fin amour poetry."[67] Indeed, Jesus is

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[65] Georgiana Donavin, *Scribit Mater: Mary and the Language Arts in the Literature of Medieval England* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 2012), 37.

[66] Donavin, *Scribit Mater*, 41.

repeatedly presented as Mary's courtly lover; for one instance, among many, the poem tells us that no woman had a lover of higher estate than Mary (28928–29).[68]

As Irvin points out, Gower implicates himself in this erotic language and, I would add, he also engages in the conventions and theatrics of courtly love. Not only does Gower address the Virgin as "ma dame" in his Life of the Virgin, but, when writing about her, he uses other tropes that are typical of the courtly and "feminine" discourse he purportedly rejects. For instance, he notes that he will "chante bass, / Car c'est un chançon cordial" (27350–51). The adjective "bass" has connotations of humility: he will sing in a "lowly" manner; however, it can also connote softness, as Wilson recognizes by translating "chante bass" as "softly." While in earlier sections of the poem, we will recall, softness has negative connotations, particularly and significantly in relation to Wantonness, the soft opposite of Hard Life, here it is transformed into a positive trait. A similar transformation takes place in his reference to the "plour and cry" (tears and weeping, 27453) with which he approaches the Virgin. Tears and weeping are also seen as wanton, deceitful ploys earlier on: when Wantonness cannot get his beloved, "En plour tout changera ses ris" (his laughter all changes to tears, 9426), and he composes songs with "maint fol suspir" (many a foolish sigh**,** 9429). Gower thus attempts to redefine the theatrical conventions of courtly love by presenting them as authentic expressions of his heart, akin to the sincere expression of contrition that he recommends in his discussion of the ritual of confession in lines 14833–15096. Nevertheless, and in the context of his own confession and his acknowledgment

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[67] Matthew Irvin, "'Noght withoute peine': Chastity, Complaint, and Lucrece's *Vox Clamantis*," in *John Gower: Others and the Self*, ed. Russell A. Peck and R. F. Yeager (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2017), 69.

[68] For further instances of Jesus as a courtly lover in the *Mirour*, see 29401, 29115–24, 29135, 29401, 29420.

that he used to engage in dramatic courtly practices, his claim to authenticity of feeling is haunted by his earlier behavior. In addition, it appears to be in stark contrast to the masculine sobriety characteristic of Hard Life's behavior.[69]

Gower's portrayal of Mary and Jesus further evokes, as does his earlier courtly poetry , other forms of gender ambiguity and queer connotations. In his narrative both Jesus and Mary are associated at times with both genders. The association of Jesus with femininity was, of course, not unique to Gower, as Carolyn Walker Bynum's pioneering book *Jesus As Mother* demonstrated some time ago.[70] More recently, Leah De Vun in "The Jesus Hermaphrodite" has further explored the attribution of both masculine and feminine qualities to Jesus in medieval texts and has also shown that such gender ambiguities can be seen in portrayals of the Virgin Mary as well.[71] DeVun draws attention to medieval texts that depict Jesus as both male and female, including a text that Gower knew well, Pierre Bersuire's *Ovidius Moralizatus*.[72] In his allegorical interpretation of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Bersuire states that Hermaphroditus is a

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[69] Contrasting Wantonness and Hard Life, Gower is like Alain de Lille. Rollo has argued that although Alain denounces the queering of language or what he calls "hermaphroditic poetics," in fact, "Nature and Alanus repeatedly partake in extravagant metaphor and figuratively perpetrate the supposed depravity they grammatically denounce" (9). A similar dynamic, I argue. is at play in Gower's prayer to the Virgin Mary and meditation on her life.

[70] Carolyn Walker Bynum, *Jesus As Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982).

[71] Leah DeVun, "The Jesus Hermaphrodite," 193–218.

[72] For studies on Gower's knowledge of the *Ovidius Moralizatus*, see Conrad Mainzer, "John Gower's Use of the 'Mediaeval Ovid' in the *Confessio Amantis*," *Medium Aevum* 41 (1972): 215–29, and Bruce Harbert, "Lessons from the Great Clerk: Ovid and John Gower," in *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art from the Middle Ages to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 83–97. See also R. F. Yeager, "John Gower and the Uses of Allusion," *Res Publica Litterarum* 7 (1984): 203–13.

figure for Christ, and the Virgin Mary is the nymph Salmacis. According to Bersuire,

Hermaphroditus "is the son of God, bridegroom above all. . . he descended to the fountain of

mercy, that is the blessed Virgin, where at once that nymph, that is, human nature, joined itself to

him, and thus he adhered to himself through the blessed incarnation, since from two natures one

being resulted."[73] Jesus, like Hermaphroditus, becomes one with the Virgin Mary. Joined

together, Jesus and Mary have thus two natures and two genders.

In his description of the Virgin's pregnancy, Gower alludes to the Virgin Mary's

incorporation of the masculine, particularly the moment she becomes pregnant with her son:

> Mais puis apres grant Joye avetz,
>
> Qant tu sentis soubz ta cotelle
>
> Le vif enfant en ta boelle,
>
> Qui s'esbanoie a tes costées;
>
> Mais qant ce vient en tes pensées,
>
> Qe c'est il par qui commencez
>
> Tous sont, le madle et la femelle,
>
> Lors sit u, dame, soies leez
>
> Nuls se doit estre esmerveillez,
>
> Q'es mere dieu et sa pucelle. (28023–32).

(Afterwards you experienced great joy when you felt under your robe the lively infant in your

womb, who was rejoicing inside you. But when the thought came to you that it was He from

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[73] DeVun, "The Jesus Hermaphrodite." 212. Translation by DeVun. The original is as follows: "Iste enim puer filius Mercurii est Dei filius super omnia sponsus . . . iste in fontem misericordia i. beatam Virginem descendit, ubi statim nimpha ista i. natura humana cum eo se coniunxit, et sic sibi per beatam incarnationem adhesit quod ex duabus naturis una persona resultavit" (qtd. in DeVun, 212).

whom all began—male and female—then it is no marvel if you, Lady, are glad for you are God's mother and His Virgin.)

This description of the Virgin feeling her infant under her robe recalls the description of the wanton man who checks the woman's folds to make sure she is female: here the Virgin's robes are hiding underneath both male (Jesus) and female (herself). The word "cotelle" in these lines is significant as well. Macaulay glosses the word as "rib," seemingly identifying it as a diminutive form for "coute" and adding a question mark to indicate that he is not certain about his translation.[74] Wilson mentions Macaulay's gloss but prefers to translate it as robe, a meaning noted by the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* under "cotele," with one "l."[75] If Macaulay's translation is correct, "cotelle" reminds us of the typological link between the Virgin and Christ and Eve and Adam.

These typological links extend to queer connotations. In the passage above Gower alludes to the two versions of the creation of Adam and Eve in Genesis: in the first version (Genesis 1:27) God creates "male and female" at the same time, while in the second one he first creates Adam and later Eve from Adam's rib (Genesis 2:7, 21–25). Gower's description of God as "He from whom all began, male and female" evokes the first one, while the word "cotelle" evokes Eve's creation from Adam's rib in the second version. Writing about the two versions in Genesis, DeVun, in "Heavenly Hermaphrodites," writes that early exegetes' desire to reconcile the two versions in Genesis led to disagreements about Adam's sex before the creation of Eve and the Fall. [76] Because the first version describes God's human creation as male and female at

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[74] Macaulay, *The Works of John Gower*, 493.

[75] Wilson, *Mirour*, 409, n. 146. *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* (http://www.anglo-norman.net/ accessed August 10, 2019).

the same time, some early exegetes argued that Adam was the "primal androgyne." According to

DeVun, this debate, though more muted, continued in the Middle Ages: "In conversations about

both the creation and the resurrection, questions about 'androgyny' or 'hermaphroditism'

surfaced repeatedly."[77] The allusion to the first version in Gower's passage ("c'est il par qui

commencez / Tous sont, le madle et la femelle") suggests a parallel between Adam and Christ in

terms of androgyny. These typological relationships are developed further several hundred lines

later. Referring again to the Virgin's pregnancy, Gower writes:

> O tu virgine, la dieu mere,
>
> Tu es des autres la primere,
>
> Qui du verraie experience
>
> De dieu sentistes la matière;
>
> Quant il entra deinz ta costiere.

(O Virgin, Mother of God, you are the first above all the others, who felt the substance of God by

her own experience when He entered your side, 28573–77).

The reference to Mary's side recalls again Adam's rib. At the same time, the creation of Eve

from Adam recalls the birth of a child from a mother and specifically, in a typological reversal,

the birth of Christ from Mary. Despite his prior construction of a link between gender ambiguity,

sin, and deceitfulness in his discussion of the Sins and Virtues, Gower here does not shy away

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[76] Leah DeVun, "Heavenly Hermaphrodites: Sexual Difference at the Beginning and End of Time" *postmedieval* 9, no.2 (2018): 132–46.

[77] DeVun, "Heavenly Hermaphrodites," 133. In this article's first footnote DeVun clarifies that she uses the terms "androgyny" and "hermaphroditism" interchangeably here because she has not seen evidence that major medieval writers made a distinction between the two (134).

from, in fact, he even draws attention here to, gender doubleness in Adam and Eve and in the Virgin and Jesus.

Through his queering of divine figures in the *Mirour* Gower constructs a different kind of poetics, one that is not solely "masculine" but embraces both genders without reveling in the uncertainties associated with Jean de Meun's "hermaphroditic poetics." What Gower does, I suggest, is akin to what DeVun argues is characteristic of a certain type of Christian symbolism:

> the unification of opposites was a prominent aspect of Christian symbolism . . . from
> Paul's remark in Galatians 3:28 to the visionary experiences of late medieval mystics,
> premodern Christianity placed great value on acts of reunification, cohesion, and
> completion. Many early Christian texts seemed to suggest that ascension toward God
> entailed the increasing reconciliation of divisions, including sexual divisions (Meeks,
> 1974) . . . Such spiritual and intellectual approaches may have prompted at least some
> thinkers to imagine the resolution or transcendence of contrary sexes as a necessary step
> in the reconciliation of humanity with God.[78]

Gower's queer poetics strives for a similar unification of opposites, a unification that starts by recognizing both male and female, rather than portraying them as two opposites, one of which must be rejected. Gower's desire for unity is evident earlier on in the *Mirour*'s discussion of the Virtues, where word and thought are not two separate entities but work as one to convey the same truth. For instance, Goodwill, Charity's second daughter, who is associated with language, is contrasted with False-semblance; the former "plainement dist et recite / Ce don't il pense et autre noun" (plainly says and recites what she thinks and nothing else, 13160–61)—her words match her thoughts. Gower, similarly, imagines his poetics as an intertwining of male and

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[78] DeVun, "Heavenly Hermaphrodites," 142.

female, rather than as an exclusively masculine-identified poetics, or an indeterminate "hermaphroditic" poetics.

In light of this reoriented poetics, how should we read the final and incomplete poem to the Virgin at the end of the *Mirour* (29917–45)? In her analysis of Gower's poetics in the *Mirour*, Nolan argues that the lyrical mode of this final poem "allows him to experiment with the sensuality of devotional language and to push the voice of the moral poet to its aesthetic limits."[79] Focusing on the bodiliness of the Virgin, Nolan also observes that Gower's poem is "designed to appeal to the senses."[80] A remarkable example of this appeal is the evocation of four senses in just three lines: "O rose sanz espine dite, / Odour de balsme, o mire eslite, / O fleur du lys, o turturelle" (O rose named without thorns, fragrance of balsam, O chosen myrrh, O flower of the lily, O turtledove, 29929–31). The senses evoked here are touch (without thorns), smell (fragrance of balsam), sight (rose, flower) and sound (the turtledove is famous for its soft, purring song). Nolan concludes that his final prayer to the Virgin offers a kind of resolution to the tension she identifies in the poem between the narrative and the lyrical: the poem "makes an important claim for the domain of the sensual as the proper domain of poetics."[81] It also recognizes, I argue, the central role that gender plays in the articulation of this tension. The domain of the sensual in Gower's *Mirour* is the domain of femininity and queerness. These domains are those of courtly poetry, the poetry that Gower purportedly disavowed. Toward the end of the *Mirour* Gower sheds rhetoric's anxiety about corporeality and queer associations and embraces some of the excesses of his earlier courtly poetry.

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[79] Nolan, "Agency and the Poetics of Sensation," 229.

[80] Nolan, "Agency and the Poetics of Sensation," 240.

[81] Nolan, "Agency and the Poetics of Sensation," 223.

Gower's return to the sensual and the lyrical, to a queer poetics, though, is a return with a difference, a reorientation. Rather than reveling in queer instabilities and indeterminacies, the style of the final poem, in its strikingly static quality, suggests a desire to stabilize meaning. The poem's twenty-nine lines are overwhelmingly comprised of nouns and adjectives. Only four words are verbs: "dure" (29928), "t'appelle" (29938), "es" (29939), and "deigna" (29943); and there are just a few pronouns, conjunctions, and prepositions. Nouns and adjectives referring to the Virgin, plus the interjection "O" accompanying them, are the only other verbal categories. In addition to the examples quoted above, other noun and adjective constructions are, for instance, "belle Olive fructuouse" (beautiful fruitful olive tree, 29923), "de la mer estoille pure" (pure star of the sea, 29925), "cliere lune esluminouse" (bright luminous moon, 29926). As the poem unfolds, names and adjectives keep accumulating. Nolan has observed that, "the naming passage goes in no direction and proceeds to no end . . . the list of names grows, all with the same referent."[82] Part of the reason they seem to proceed to no end is that the manuscript is missing some final leaves and we, therefore, do not know how much longer they continued and whether there was a concluding set of lines that clarified the aim of the poem. Another reason is that none of the three verbs in the poem are active or imply movement. They thus contribute to conveying a sense of permanence; this is especially so in the case of "dure" ("lasts"), which seems like a pun on "dur" ("hard"). In this moment of ecstatic contemplation, Gower makes time stand still.

The poem's stillness contrasts with the sense of movement and uncertainty in the passage describing the Sins' hermaphroditic qualities. Gower, as observed earlier in this article, tells us that he does not know how to write about them: "Si noun de femme les endite, / Les filles dont je

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[82] Nolan, "Agency and the Poetics of Sensation," 239.

vous endite / Sont auci homme nepourquant" (1030–32). There is a sense of movement back and forth in these lines. What are they? Male or female, or both? If he calls them one thing, they are another. In his poem to the Virgin, by contrast, Gower conveys not a sense of uncertainty or movement between attributes, but of an accumulation of those attributes. We have to perceive these attributes gradually, as Gower describes them, because language is linear, but we imagine they are simply there, all manifesting at the same time. The poem's static quality can thus be seen as an attempt to freeze, to keep in place the signifiers knocked loose by the queer. This attempt relies on confidently adding attributes and metaphors, rather than eliminating them, as Gower's denunciation of the excesses of queer courtly poetry might have led us to expect.

Gower's poetics is thus both different from and similar to Alain's and Jean's hermaphroditic poetics. In the *Mirour* Gower develops a poetics that locates its new authorial voice in a style that is unlike Alain's and Jean's "hermaphroditic" poetics in that, while recognizing indeterminacies, it still yearns for stability. At the same time, it is like the French authors' poetics in that, like Hermaphroditus and Salmacis, Gower's poetics intertwines male and female.

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