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Godfrey of Viterbo's *Pantheon* and John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*: The Story of Apollonius Retold

The titillating story of Apollonius of Tyre captured the medieval imagination and intrigued authors who rewrote this incest narrative time and time again. The oldest primary source for scholarly evaluations of the tale is the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri*, which Elizabeth Archibald dates to the fifth or sixth century CE.¹ Many versions of the Apollonius story may eventually be traced back to this text, including Shakespeare's *Pericles*.² In writing *Pericles*, Shakespeare's debt to John Gower's version of the "Tale of Apollonius of Tyre" in the *Confessio Amantis* is fully acknowledged,³ whereas scholars have been reluctant to accept Gower's debt to Godfrey of Viterbo's *Pantheon*, the title of which the poet mentions explicitly at the beginning of the tale.⁴ Despite this fact, surprisingly little research has been done on the textual relationship between Godfrey's text and Book VIII of the *Confessio* because many critics have been highly skeptical of the trustworthiness of Gower's mention of his acknowledged source. P. Goolden, for instance, states that Gower "avowedly used Godfrey of Viterbo's *Pantheon*," but that "this [cannot be] literally true," as there are passages in the *Confessio* which Goolden could not find in the *Pantheon*.⁵ Other researchers

¹ Elizabeth Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations: Including the Text of the Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri with an English Translation* (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1991), 6.

² The popularity of the Apollonius story is evinced by the forty-three Latin and vernacular versions of the story up to the seventeenth century and the thirty-seven medieval and Renaissance allusions to the story that Elizabeth Archibald could find in her 1991 study. See also Helen Cooper "This worthy olde writer': *Pericles* and other Gowers, 1592–1640," in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Siân Echard, 43–60. Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2004.

³ Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre*, 213.

⁴ John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 2nd ed., ed. Russell A. Peck and trans. Andrew Galloway (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006), VIII. 271–73. All quotations are taken from this edition. <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/peck-gower-confessio-amantis-book-8>

⁵ P. Goolden, "Antiochus's Riddle in Gower and Shakespeare," *The Review of English Studies* 6, no. 23 (1955): 245–51 (247).

even neglect to mention the *Pantheon*, thereby completely disregarding Gower's explicit mention of it, and assume his main source to be the *Historia*.⁶ These scholars have mostly sought to explain how the "Tale of Apollonius of Tyre" operates within the *Confessio* without taking the *Pantheon*, Gower's acknowledged source, into consideration. Archibald appears to be an exception to this rule in calling Gower's reference to the *Pantheon*, and his subsequent use of it, Gower's "obvious debt" to Godfrey.⁷ By spending more time examining the *Pantheon* and its different manuscript editions and by considering Antiochus's riddle in both works, this paper aims to provide a more complete insight into Gower's narrative construction of the *Confessio* and the manuscript version of the *Pantheon* that Gower most likely used as his guide.

Gower's "obvious debt" to Godfrey is visible not only in Gower's reference to the *Pantheon* in the opening lines of the tale, but indeed through strong thematic and stylistic similarities to Godfrey's work throughout Book VIII. Godfrey's and Gower's approaches to Fortune in the Apollonius story are very similar and form a pivotal part of the narrative structures of their works. Characters are judged by their responses to the vicissitudes of Fortune in both Godfrey's and Gower's works. Stylistically, Godfrey and Gower employ a similar terseness which nonetheless makes their narratives very vivid. Godfrey's influence on Gower in these matters is too important to ignore.

In order to understand scholarly skepticism concerning Gower's use of the *Pantheon*, it is worth briefly considering critical reception of this textual connection, beginning with one of Gower's most influential editors: G.C. Macaulay. Macaulay acknowledges the textual connection between the *Confessio* and the *Pantheon*, while expressing doubts about its significance. Macaulay argues that Gower referred to the *Pantheon*, "as a grave historical

⁶ William Randolph Robins, "Ancient Romance and Medieval Literary Genres: Apollonius of Tyre" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1995), 170.

⁷ Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre*, 186.

authority,” to add *auctoritas* to his work, rather than using the text as a chief source.⁸

Macaulay’s discussion of the *Pantheon*’s relationship to the *Confessio* is definitely useful, but it does not present a thorough investigation of the question he poses. Macaulay also remarks on Godfrey’s style by deeming it a “peculiar kind of verse.”⁹ This stylistic peculiarity as a mode of writing was actually particularly suited to Gower’s needs, as I will discuss below.

Contrary to the lack of attention Godfrey has received in recent decades, his *Pantheon*, like other medieval encyclopaedic works, was quite well-known among his contemporaries and remained so until “[a]s late as the fifteenth century.”¹⁰ During the Middle Ages his work was considered authoritative in relating events of the past, and Godfrey’s “approach to writing” was mimicked by other authors.¹¹ The popularity of the *Pantheon* is evident in numerous manuscript versions and editions based on them, works mentioned by Samuel Singer, one of the three leading editors who published editions of the *Pantheon* in the late nineteenth century.¹² The fact that Godfrey has been of little interest to modern readers can also be explained in part by his unreliability on historical facts; one critic even goes so far as to call him “a long-winded author, devoid of any political understanding.”¹³ Godfrey’s contemporary popularity, however, as well as his lasting influence, proves that regardless of modern readers’ assessment of the *Pantheon*, Godfrey was well-established as a medieval *auctor*, worthy of a literary lineage.

⁸ G.C. Macaulay, “Notes: Lib. VIII,” in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, ed. G.C. Macaulay, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899), 3:537.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.536.

¹⁰ Carlos Arturo Contreras, “Gottfried of Viterbo: An Appraisal” (PhD diss., University of California, Los Angeles, 1972), 306.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 295, 306.

¹² Samuel Singer, *Apollonius von Tyrus: Untersuchungen über Das Fortleben des Antiken Romans in Späteren Zeiten* (Halle a.S.: M. Niemeyer, 1895).

¹³ Contreras, “Appraisal,” 72.

Gower's reference to the *Pantheon* at the beginning of the "Tale of Apollonius of Tyre" reads as an acknowledgment of Godfrey's *auctoritas*:

Of a cronique in daies gon,
The which is cleped *Pantheon*,
In loves cause I rede thus¹⁴

By placing the reference to the *Pantheon* at such a critical moment in the narrative—the beginning—Gower establishes the text as his main source. Gower furthermore reminds his audience of the ancient *auctoritas* of this source by explicitly stating that it was written in "daies gon." Macaulay's assertion that Gower included the *Pantheon* to lend extra historical weight to his retelling of the "Tale of Apollonius of Tyre" thus appears to be correct; however, this reference does not just lend credence to Gower's adaptation. It simultaneously claims the *Pantheon* as a literary framework for reading Gower's story of Apollonius. Macaulay also highlights Book VIII's interest in incest and concludes that it must have been cause for "some embarrassment" to Gower.¹⁵ With this remark, Macaulay points toward perhaps the primary reason that scholars have found it difficult to accept Gower's reference to the *Pantheon*, since for the greater part of the twentieth century, they could not square Gower's choice to end the *Confessio* with an incest narrative with a poem about a lover's confession and search for redemption.¹⁶ By the 1990s, however, scholarly assessments concerning the suitability of ending the *Confessio* with a story about incest became more positive.¹⁷ Georgiana Donavin, for instance, demonstrates the importance of the incest theme

¹⁴ Gower, *Confessio*, VIII.271–73.

¹⁵ Macaulay, *Complete Works*, 3:536.

¹⁶ Robert F. Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic: The Search for a New Arion* (Woodbridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1990), 216–17. For a more in-depth discussion concerning the nineteenth and twentieth-century reception of the *Confessio*'s explorations of incest, see Larry Scanlon, "Gower, Lydgate, and Incest," in *John Gower. Others and the Self*, ed. Russell A. Peck and R.F. Yeager (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2017), 156–82.

¹⁷ A. J. Minnis, "Gower's Ethical Microcosm and Political Macrocosm," in *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. A.J. Minnis (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1983), 77; Russell A.

to the structure of the *Confessio* as a whole. Rather than regarding incest as a cause for Gower's embarrassment, Donavin persuasively argues for reading the poet's focus on incest as a very conscious and deliberate choice. Donavin explains: "During the Middle Ages the meaning of *incest* was paradoxical: when used literally, the word signified the abominable sin of consanguineous sex; when represented allegorically, it signified mystical union with God."¹⁸ Donavin claims that this paradox between literal and allegorical incest forms the basis for the structure of the *Confessio*. This reading of the *Confessio* is very compelling as it addresses Macaulay's and later critics' concerns about the ending of the *Confessio*. As a main theme and organizing principle of the *Confessio*, the incest narrative constituted the perfect and necessary apotheosis to Book VIII, addressing the paradox finally and definitively. Book VIII offers Amans the final motivation to turn away from imitating Venus and Cupid's incestuous Court of Love, a movement that had already begun in previous tales.¹⁹ Like Donavin, Sebastian Sobecki also points out that the incest theme recurs throughout the *Confessio*, not just in Book VIII, and he dryly remarks that the poem contains "all flavours of incest."²⁰ Also demonstrating the necessity of the *Confessio*'s conclusion, Sobecki figures incest as "a thematic device to demonstrate the efficacy of marriage as a cure for lechery."²¹ Gower's specific use of the *Pantheon* adds force to these arguments that ending the *Confessio* with the "Tale of Apollonius of Tyre" was crucial.

Peck, *Kingship & Common Profit in Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), 169; Yeager, *John Gower's Poetic*, 216–17.

¹⁸ Georgiana Donavin, *Incest Narratives and the Structure of Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Victoria, B.C.: English Literary Studies, 1993), 9.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

²⁰ Sebastian Sobecki, "Educating Richard: Incest, Marriage, and (Political) Consent in Gower's 'Tale of Apollonius'," *Anglia - Zeitschrift für englische Philologie* 125, no. 2 (2009): 205–216 (208).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 211.

The riddle that Antiochus poses to Apollonius at the beginning of the “Tale of Apollonius of Tyre” provides an important point of contact between Godfrey’s *Pantheon* and Gower’s *Confessio*. Antiochus’s riddle and Apollonius’s response to it condense the tale’s themes of incest, identity, and Fortune. Antiochus’s riddle also provides the most important textual evidence for Gower’s use of the *Pantheon* as an important source rather than the *Historia*. Goolden seems to be the most recent scholar to analyze the textual lineage of Antiochus’s riddle. Goolden considers Gower’s version of the riddle as being based on a “corrupt[ed]”²² version of the riddle contained in the *Historia*. The riddle in the *Historia* reads: “Scelere vehor, maternam carnem vescor, quaero *fratrem meum*, meae matris virum, uxoris meae filium: non invenio (“I am borne on crime; I eat my mother’s flesh; I seek my brother, my mother’s husband, my wife’s son; I do not find him”).²³ In contrast, Gower’s version reads:

With felonie I am upbore,
I ete and have it noight forbore
Mi modres fleissh, whos housebonde
Mi fader forto seche I fonde,
Which is the sone ek of my wif.²⁴

Where the version in the *Historia* has “*fratrem meum*” (“my brother”), Gower’s version instead contains “*Mi fader*.” Since Gower was composing a Middle English translation of a Latin source text, scribal error seems less likely than the possibility of Gower’s Latin source text containing “*patrem*” instead of “*fratrem*.”

²² Goolden, “Riddle,” 246.

²³ *Historia*, 114-15, my emphasis. Goolden’s text contains “*materna carne*” instead of “*maternam carnem*.”

²⁴ Gower, *Confessio*, VIII.405-09, my emphasis.

In Singer's edition of the *Pantheon*, Godfrey's riddle indeed contains "patrem": "Scelere vereor, materna carne vescor; quero *patrem meum*, matris mee virum, uxoris mee filium, nec invenio" ("I am borne with crime, I feed on my mother's flesh; I seek my father, the husband of my mother, the son of my wife, but I do not find him").²⁵ Like Godfrey, Gower uses a word for "father," instead of "brother," clearly establishing a textual connection for which Gower would have needed access to a manuscript copy of the *Pantheon*. Goolden puzzlingly states, however, that the riddle is "omitted in Godfrey of Viterbo's version."²⁶ Looking at Singer's analysis of the textual lineage of Godfrey's *Pantheon* can help to explain Goolden's error. Singer identifies three different editions of the *Pantheon*, only one of which contains "patrem" as well as "vereor" (instead of "vehor") as the second word.²⁷ This third edition is based on Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Latin MS 5003, the manuscript that must have been Gower's source text for the *Pantheon*. Goolden apparently was unaware of the fact that there were more manuscript versions of the *Pantheon*, although given the text's enduring popularity, the existence of several manuscripts is hardly surprising. Goolden does provide an explanation for the different meanings arising from either "patrem" or "fratrem" in the riddle:

Quaero patrem meum (c i) instead of *quaero fratrem meum* (c) contains the idea that the future husband, whom Antiochus seeks for his daughter, would not be, as originally, his brother-in-law, but his father-in-law, because his daughter, as we have already seen, is also his mother-in-law; her husband would therefore be his father-in-law.²⁸

²⁵ Godfrey, *Pantheon*, "Problema Antiochi," my emphasis.

²⁶ Goolden, "Riddle," 247, n2.

²⁷ Singer, *Untersuchungen*, 180.

²⁸ Goolden, "Riddle," 247–248 (emphasis in the original).

Both Gower and Godfrey (in the third recension of the *Pantheon*) thus seem to add an extra layer of meaning with the word “patrem” with which the incest theme is again invoked. As Antiochus is father and father-in-law at the same time, he consumes the normally exogamous role of father-in-law and combines it in one person, a sort of incest of the self, a destruction of his identity. Interestingly, Macaulay only quotes the riddle without attempting to explain it himself,²⁹ and Larry Scanlon theorizes that the contradictions within the riddle simply make it so that the riddle is not meant to be solved.³⁰ Incest, in all its destructiveness, should perhaps be so incomprehensible as to be unreadable. The fact that Apollonius can interpret the riddle makes him circumspect, and according to Scanlon, reveals a long road of atonement for the hero.³¹ Apollonius is an appealing choice as the protagonist of the *Confessio*’s final story since, having been trapped by incest once at the beginning, he is thus susceptible to temptation and in need of the final redemption that makes a morally satisfying end to the *Confessio*.

Antiochus’s riddle showcases the textual and thematic relationships between the *Pantheon* and the *Confessio*. Gower’s reference to the *Pantheon* as his source in the first lines of the narrative strengthens the thematic connection between the two works. After introducing the *Pantheon* as an ancient “cronique,”³² Gower subsequently places Apollonius’s story of love within this historical context: “In loves cause I rede thus”³³ By emphasizing that the

²⁹ Macaulay, *Complete Works*, 3:538.

³⁰ Larry Scanlon, “The Riddle of Incest: John Gower and the Problem of Medieval Sexuality,” in *Re-Visioning Gower*, ed. Robert F. Yeager (Asheville, NC: Pegasus Press, 1998), 93–127 (125).

³¹ Scanlon, “Riddle of Incest,” 126.

³² Gower, *Confessio*, VIII. 271.

³³ *Ibid.*, VIII. 273.

“Tale of Apollonius of Tyre” concerns love, Gower legitimizes its presence in a work ostensibly modelled after a lover’s shrift.

Gower also draws a parallel between the sweeping array of narratives in the *Pantheon* and the similar variety in the *Confessio*. Gower’s early reference to the *Pantheon* as his source must therefore also be read not only as a comment that Apollonius’s story belongs within a historical context, but also as a statement about genre and modes of writing. The *Pantheon* is thus significantly closer than the *Historia* to the strategies that Gower uses to frame his “Apollonius.” The *Historia*, containing various narrative approaches, is difficult to identify generically, and Archibald observes the suitability of various genres for appropriating this story. She starts by deliberating whether the *Historia* can be seen as a romance tale and concedes that it “may pass muster as a romance of adventure on the basis of content.”³⁴ However, in the end she concludes that it cannot pass as a romance since it does not discuss either chivalry or the character of courtly life that is so “characteristic of medieval romance.”³⁵ The *Historia* also does not spend any time on the characterizations of its protagonists but presents them as stereotypes: Apollonius, the brave knight; his future wife, the spoiled but beautiful princess; and King Archistrates, the goodly father. Archibald goes on to say that the Apollonius narrative cannot be considered an epic tale as it shows no “consistent patterns of noble behavior”³⁶ typical of the epic genre. She further states that in order for the *Historia* to be classified as an *exemplum*, it should be more succinct and contain more moralizing.³⁷ The classic *Historia* belongs to none of the genres mentioned above,³⁸

³⁴ Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre*, 83.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 87.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 106.

whereas both Godfrey and Gower situate the Apollonius story amidst a variety of narrative types, frame it with reflections on history, and explicitly declare it an *exemplum*.

It is exactly this difficulty of labelling the content of the *Historia* in which we find the key to what inextricably binds the two texts of Gower and Godfrey together, for they present the tale in a strictly moral context. As both texts focus on morality, “Apollonius” functions as an *exemplum*, a purpose identified by both Godfrey and Gower. In the Latin note at the start of his Apollonius story, Gower calls it the following: “mirabile exemplum de magno rege Antiocho” (“A miraculous instructive example about the great king Antiochus”),³⁹ while Godfrey himself refers to the meliorating effects of reading the story of Apollonius in his *Memoria Seculorum* (a precursor to the *Pantheon*):

Inter cetera et ad tuum delectationem de Alexandro
Magno et de Appollonio Tyro et de Gog et Magog
atque de quibusdam aliis rarioribus et auditu dulcioribus
aliquantulum diffusius adnotavimus, ad glorie tue maius
gaudium et oblectamentum.

(Among other things, for your delectation I have made
some notes in somewhat greater detail about Alexander
the Great and Apollonius of Tyre and Gog and Magog,
and about certain others who are less well known and
even sweeter to hear about, for the greater joy and
pleasure of your great majesty.)⁴⁰

³⁹ Gower, *Confessio*, Latin gloss at line 272.

⁴⁰ Godfrey of Viterbo, *Memoria Seculorum*, qtd. in *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations: Including the Text of the Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri with an English Translation*, ed. Elizabeth Archibald (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1991), 224.

While Gower declares “Apollonius of Tyre” to be an admonition to lovers, like Godfrey, he insists on the narrative’s place in history and contemporary politics. After having begun the *Confessio*’s Book VIII with a history of marriage and incest, Gower reminds the reader that the narrative is an “ensample”:

And in ensample as it is write,
That alle lovers myhten wite
How ate laste it schal be sene
Of love what thei wolden mene.⁴¹

Like Godfrey, Gower wrote to provide accounts of western history and promote specific political interests. Carlos Arturo Contreras states that the *Pantheon* was “written to support the political claims to supremacy over Christian society of Frederick Barbarossa and to provide [the Holy Roman Emperor] Henry VI with historical arguments to support those claims.”⁴² The concept of using history as “evidence” for the supremacy of an ideology or a king is quite well-known and was often used in the Middle Ages (as indeed it can be said that it is still used today): think, for instance, of Geoffrey of Monmouth’s *Historia Regum Britanniae*. Godfrey was no stranger to this idea, but the commendation of his patron Henry VI to the general (literate) public was not the only advancement Godfrey was hoping for, as can be read in his Prologue to the *Pantheon* where he “adheres to the general opinion which held history as the mistress of life since kings could not fulfil their duty of ruling without a knowledge of the course of the world, of its origin and of the teachings of the Scriptures.”⁴³ Godfrey’s *Pantheon* can therefore be marked as the medieval genre of the so-

⁴¹ Gower, *Confessio*, VIII.1999 – 2002.

⁴² Contreras, “Appraisal,” ix.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 73-74.

called “mirror [for] princes,” or *speculum principis*,⁴⁴ which, in Godfrey’s case, was intended to edify the king for the purpose of the common good through recounting stories of good leadership from the past.

Through an exploration of incest in Book VIII, Gower, like Godfrey, further solidifies the strong political themes—and he does so in an order that shows Godfrey’s influence. In the *Pantheon*, right before Godfrey relates his version of the Apollonius narrative, he recounts the life and death of Alexander; Gower imitates Godfrey in placing “Apollonius of Tyre” after discoursing upon Aristotle’s advice to Alexander.⁴⁵ Political themes have not only been an integral part of the *Confessio* from the Prologue to Book VI, but they are brought more to the fore in Book VII which can be read as a “mirror for princes.” Whereas Book VII is designed to provide the monarch and the reader with advice, Book VIII showcases the terrible consequences for a ruler who does not follow this advice and indulges in incest. Sobecki points out that Book VIII’s preface, as one of its “unique features,” combines the history of marriage with the history of the incest prohibition.⁴⁶ Matters of incest and of love are thus immediately moved into a legal atmosphere and connected, as Sobecki rightly argues, with matters of kingship.⁴⁷ Donavin also indicates that ending the *Confessio* with the story of Apollonius’s and Antiochus’s incest allows Gower to make “the connection between consanguineous liaison and tyranny” absolutely clear to his readers.⁴⁸ María Bullón-Fernández equates Antiochus’s particular kind of incest—father-daughter—to the “negation

⁴⁴ Contreras, “Appraisal,” 128 and Robert Epstein, “London, Southwark, Westminster: Gower’s Urban Contexts,” in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Siân Echard (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 2004), 43—60 (59).

⁴⁵ Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre*, 185

⁴⁶ Sobecki, “Educating,” 208.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 215–16.

⁴⁸ Donavin, *Incest Narratives*, 72.

of the social and public act of marriage, even the negation of society itself.”⁴⁹ Antiochus’s incest thus constitutes more than just self-destruction, as it includes the complete dissolution of social bonds and consequently of society.

Even though Gower’s confessional narrative is seemingly quite different from Godfrey’s historical account of kings, their purpose is the same. Both authors relate Apollonius’s love story for the improvement of the common good, and, like Godfrey, Gower also makes use of historical narratives so that the English people are aware of their past and learn from it. Steele Nowlin states that Gower uses these historical narratives to “[define] the problems of the present in terms of the *lore* of the past.”⁵⁰ This objective of amending society is clearly mentioned in both the Prologue and at the end of Book VIII. In the Prologue, Gower mentions that

What schal befall hierafterward
 God wot, for now upon this tyde
 Men se the world on every syde
 In sondry wyse so diversed,
 That it wel nyh stant al reversed,
 As for to speke of tyme ago.⁵¹

Again at the end of his “bok for Engelondes sake,”⁵² Gower emphasizes that his readers should learn from the past, for

Singular profit . . . is cause of mochil synne,

⁴⁹ María Bullón-Fernández, *Fathers and Daughters in Gower’s Confessio Amantis*, *Publications of the John Gower Society* 5 (Cambridge, UK: Brewer, 2000): 14.

⁵⁰ Steele Nowlin, “Narratives of Incest and Incestuous Narrative: Memory, Process, and the *Confessio Amantis*’s ‘Middel Weie,’” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 35, no. 2 (2005): 217-244 (220).

⁵¹ Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, Gower, Prolog. 26–31.

⁵² *Ibid.*, Prolog. 24.

And namely of divisioun,
Which many a noble worthi toun
Fro welthe and fro prosperité
Hath brought to gret adversité.⁵³

These two passages convey Gower's statement of intent for the *Confessio*. Both stress the instability of the world and pinpoint "divisioun" and the "diversed" nature of the world as the text's main concern. Division—selfish focus on personal gain—has led to the downfall of many successful towns, as the second passage clearly states. Combined, the stories in the *Confessio* have showcased division's destructive capabilities on both larger and smaller scales than towns. One of the larger scales is reflected in that the "bok for Engelondes sake" was formerly "A book for King Richardes sake" in the previous recension.⁵⁴ This change possibly reflects Gower's consideration of King Richard II's rule and its shortcomings.⁵⁵ Russell Peck indicates that the *Confessio* is riddled "with tales about good and bad rule that complement the overall plot."⁵⁶

The thematic content of the admonitions against incest and bad rule is best developed in the story of Apollonius. In Gower's "exemplary summa"⁵⁷ we find all of these elements bundled up into one single story that lays bare the underlying structure at work in his *Confessio*, weaving narrative elements together. Antiochus's personal failing to overcome the obstacles laid before him by Fortune leads not only to his own destruction, but also to a leaderless kingdom in disarray. In contrast, Apollonius's success in overcoming misfortunes

⁵³ Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, VIII.3039–3044.

⁵⁴ Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, Prol.24 and Prol.*24.

⁵⁵ Epstein, 56-57.

⁵⁶ Russell A. Peck, "The Politics and Psychology of Governance in Gower: Ideas of Kingship and Real Kings" in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Siân Echard (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2004): 215-238 (220).

⁵⁷ Robins, "Romance," 169.

results in personal and kingdom-wide happiness. By including a statement of intent both at the beginning and at the end of the *Confessio*, Gower encapsulates all of the *Confessio*'s tales within a framework and thus informs his audience about how to read them. The reader, as well as Amans, is instructed in how to learn from tales of the past by considering the final example of Apollonius, who is able to overcome present obstacles by relying on his knowledge of a stable past. Apollonius is challenged when presented with episodes of incest, but after he has resisted the temptation of these instances and he has also proven himself worthy in the final instance with Tharsia, this is proof that his trials have established his worth. Just as the *Confessio*'s reader learns from the events of history as the poem progresses, Apollonius learns from his experiences to reject incest.

The stylistic execution of the genre of the “mirror for princes” in both Book VIII of the *Confessio* and the *Pantheon* occurs in very similar ways. In contrast to the *Historia*, both Gower and Godfrey adhere to the main characteristics of an *exemplum* by maintaining a terse style of writing. Gower's “plain style”⁵⁸ and his couplets in octosyllabic verse allow for short, comprehensive outbursts with which he could direct his narrative material in pointed, contained speeches. Godfrey's three-lined stanzas, usually highlighting one single point of his narrative, produce a similarly compact narrative. There are, however, some differences when it comes to their style, as where Godfrey can sometimes be quite brisk and matter-of-fact in his narrative, Gower dramatizes the events that take place. Samuel Singer, for instance, points out the difference between the queen of Antioch's death in Godfrey and in Gower by noting that “V[iterbo] hat nur ‘matreque defuncta’” (“Viterbo merely states ‘matreque defuncta’ [‘the mother died’] [in the first stanza]”).⁵⁹ Godfrey spends only three lines on the death of her mother and her father's subsequent incestuous love:

⁵⁸ Robert F. Yeager, “‘Oure Englisshē’ and Everyone's Latin: The Fasciculus Morum and Gower's ‘Confessio Amantis’,” *South Atlantic Review* 46, no. 4 (1981): 41-53 (47).

⁵⁹ Singer, *Untersuchungen*, 178.

Filia Seleuci regis stat clara decore,
matreque defuncta pater arsit in eius amore
res habet effectum, pressa puella dolet.

(The daughter of the Syrian king stood in bright beauty

And after her mother died, her father burned in his love for her:

The matter took place; the raped girl suffered.)⁶⁰

Gower, in contrast, spends almost thirty lines at the beginning of his narrative discussing the mother's death and the daughter's rape, during which he gives a fuller account of the father's and daughter's emotions than Godfrey does. Gower comments on how Antiochus "made mochel mone"⁶¹ after Antiochus's wife died and how his daughter "was tendre and full of drede" when Antiochus imposed himself upon her. Gower, on the whole, seems more feeling than Godfrey. These differences in style point to minor variations in the execution of the same technique, however. Both authors achieve a concise narrative, very different from the *Historia* which, though challenging to identify generically in terms of narrative content, contains a more expansive style of writing that is more appropriate to epic or romance.⁶²

Despite a few minor instances, both Godfrey and Gower demonstrably make use of the plain style or *sermo humilis*. As John Burrow's study showcases, the *Confessio* does not depend on rhetorical devices very often and its diction remains mostly simple and straightforward, in line with the plain style.⁶³ Maura Nolan provides further insight into how

⁶⁰ Godfrey of Viterbo, *Pantheon*, in *Apollonius von Tyrus: Untersuchungen über Das Fortleben des Antiken Romans in Spättern Zeiten*, ed. Samuel Singer (Halle a.S.: M. Niemeyer, 1895), 153–177, stanza 1. As of yet, a modern English translation of the *Pantheon* does not exist. My translation of the section concerning the story of Apollonius (*Cronica de Apollonio*) will appear in the next issue of *Accessus*.

⁶¹ Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, VIII. 283.

⁶² *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* in *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations: Including the Text of the Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri with an English Translation*, ed. and trans. Elizabeth Archibald (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1991), 83.

⁶³ Burrow, "Styles," 246–47.

Gower's and Godfrey's styles are similar when she demonstrates the suitability of the plain style to "represent and indeed to recreate sensory experience."⁶⁴ She showcases the use of plain phrases that achieve a heightened sensory effect through the addition of only a few adorning phrases and adjectives.⁶⁵ When applied to Gower, Nolan identifies the same lack of adornment and pursuit of "recreat[ing] sensory experience" in the *Confessio*, "a masterpiece of the plain style in Middle English."⁶⁶ The same statements could be applied to Godfrey. When considering the stanza quoted above, it is clear that Godfrey is very selective in his choice of words, using only those that are necessary for understanding the narrative. Adjectives and turns of phrases used in this style thus receive added weight. Nolan also points out Gower's "sparing use of imagery and corresponding emphasis on movement."⁶⁷ In Godfrey's phrase "pressa puella dolet," the reader can almost feel the physical pressure exerted over the body of Antiochus's daughter, pressed into her silent suffering, unable to scream for help. The lack of imagery and Godfrey's use of literal language allow a similar focus on movement in the narrative that Nolan establishes in the *Confessio*. Gower's passage on the rape of Antiochus's daughter in the *Confessio* mirrors Godfrey's treatment in the *Pantheon*. Godfrey conveys the beauty of Antiochus's daughter as a still image: "stat clara decore" ("[she] stood in bright beauty").⁶⁸ The stillness of this image is disrupted when her father forces her into movement ("pressa"). Gower uses Godfrey's imagery and language when he writes:

⁶⁴ Maura Nolan, "Sensation and the Plain Style in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," in *John Gower. Others and the Self*, ed. Russell A. Peck and R. F. Yeager (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell & Brewer, 2017): 111–140 (111–12)

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 111–13.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 113.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁶⁸ Godfrey, *Pantheon*, stanza 1.

The king, which made mochel mone,
Tho stod, as who seith, al him one
Withoute wif, bot natheles
His doghter, which was piereles
Of beauté, duelte aboute him stille.⁶⁹

Gower has made creative use of Godfrey’s imagery and wording in further reinforcing the daughter’s stillness by also extending it to her father. The daughter stands alone—“stille” in unparalleled beauty, and Antiochus— also immobile and solitary—reveals his divorce from the rest of the world. When the father moves violently toward his daughter to “spille” her motionless beauty,⁷⁰ Gower stresses once again how the daughter “lay stille.”⁷¹

The plain style is also important to Godfrey’s and Gower’s characterizations of the text’s protagonists. Donavin points out Gower’s grounding of his plain style in Aristotle’s *Rhetoric*, specifically in Book VII of the *Confessio*, and the plain style’s “veracity and accountability.”⁷² Drawing a rigid line between good and bad characters in the plain style, Godfrey and Gower express straightforward truths and make the characters seem responsible for their own actions. Antiochus’s description, for instance, is a good example of this. Some critics believe that Gower wished to lessen the brutality of Antiochus’s incestuous act by mentioning mitigating circumstances. Archibald is among this set of critics, stating: “[Gower] allows some sympathy for Antiochus’ passion, or at least some understanding (l. 289: “the fleissh is frele and falleth oft”).”⁷³ Archibald and others might have confused Gower’s

⁶⁹ Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, VIII.283–287.

⁷⁰ Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, VIII.297.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, VIII.314.

⁷² Georgiana Donavin, “Rhetorical Gower: Aristotelianism in the *Confessio Amantis*’s Treatment of ‘Rhetorique’,” in *John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts*, ed. Malte Urban (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2009): 155–173 (165).

⁷³ *Historia*, 192.

supposed leniency toward Antiochus with the presentation in the *Historia*, since mitigating circumstances are mentioned in the latter:

Qui cum luctatur cum furore, pugnat cum dolore,
vincitur amore; excidit illi pietas, oblitus est se esse
patrem et induit coniugem.

(He struggled with madness, he fought against passion,
but he was defeated by love; he lost his sense of moral
responsibility, forgot that he was a father, and took on
the role of husband.)⁷⁴

In the *Historia*, Antiochus's character has been made a bit less repulsive because, at first, he is still aware that his incestuous desires are wrong, and he even tries to prevent himself from committing the incestuous act before a wave of immoral passion wipes away all of his concerns. It is, however, not the case that Gower is similarly lenient toward Antiochus as is clear from the following lines:

Thus hath this king al that him liste
Of his likinge and his plesance,
And laste in such continuance,
And such delit he tok therinne,
Him thoghte that it was no sinne.⁷⁵

As the king commits incest entirely “[f]or liking and concupiscence / Withoute insihte of conscience,”⁷⁶ he does not consider the rape of his daughter sinful. Archibald's interpretation

⁷⁴ Ibid., 112–13. All translations of the *Historia* have been taken from Elizabeth Archibald's edition.

⁷⁵ Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, VIII.342--46.

⁷⁶ Ibid., VIII.293--94.

of “the fleissh is frele and falleth oft” as a mitigating circumstance thus reads as a condemnation of the weakness of human flesh instead. Godfrey’s characterization of Antiochus is equally unforgiving, as Godfrey’s brevity, quoted above, adds extra bleakness in his account of the incest scene.⁷⁷ Godfrey does not allow for any duplicity and prevents the interpretation that Antiochus might have had any moral angst about his villainous act. The incestuous rape is presented as an impersonal force not bound by human laws of compassion. This is again emphasized by marking Antiochus’s crime as “inhumanum” (“inhuman”)⁷⁸ in the following stanza. By using the word “inhumanum,” Godfrey also indicates Antiochus’s renunciation of his own humanity. Both authors leave no room for speculation about Antiochus’s character and deeds: they are sinful and inhumane.

Gower and Godfrey are again equally uncompromising in their portrayal of the Tharsian Tranquilio, whereas the *Historia* provides reasons for clemency in the following passage:

“Lugeam me et innocentem virginem, qui iunctus
sum ad pessimam venenosamque serpentem et iniquam
coniugem!” Et in caelum levans oculos ait: “Deus, tu
scis quia purus sum a sanguine Tarsiae, et requires et
vindices illam in Dionysiade.”

(Let me mourn for myself and for the innocent girl,
for I am yoked to a most evil and poisonous snake, a
wicked wife!” Raising his eyes to heaven he said:

“God, you know that I am innocent of Tarsia’s blood.
Seek her out, and take vengeance for her on Dionysias.)⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Godfrey, *Pantheon*, stanza 1.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, stanza 2.

⁷⁹ *Historia*, 148--49.

The *Historia*'s Tranquilio claims that he simply did not know about Tharsia's plight and must therefore be forgiven by God and even begs God to take divine vengeance on his own wife. Despite his claims and pleas for striking down his wife, Tranquilio still aided her in concealing the crime and dies with her. Characterizing Tranquilio's moral status as less clear-cut, the *Historia* allows for the interpretation of him as either a villain who was just as evil as his wife, or an innocent bystander to his wife's wicked crime. In contrast, Gower's version clearly marks him as a villain. Gower's Tranquilio shows no signs of remorse for what his wife has done, as he participates without objection when his wife affects innocence and pretends to be in mourning:

And for to give a more feith,
 Hire housebonde and ek sche bothe
 In blake clothes thei hem clothe,
 And made a gret enterrement.⁸⁰

In Godfrey's version, Tranquilio takes on an even more active role, for he himself commands that Tharsia be killed: "Tranquilio dum sepe suo serva iubet ista, / Hospita pessima plus Dionysia mandat et instat" ("While Tranquilio orders the wretched slave many times [to harm Tharsia], / The very wicked hostess Dionysia gives the commandment and urges the slave even more").⁸¹ Thus, both Gower and Godfrey mark Tranquilio's character with unmistakable guilt.

The only morally ambiguous character who remains in the two works is Athenagoras. In the *Historia*, Athenagoras is presented as a benevolent libertine, who happily plays the part of Tharsia's patron after trying to impose himself upon her and being warded off by her pleas.

⁸⁰ Gower, *Confessio*, VIII.1520--23.

⁸¹ Godfrey, *Pantheon*, stanza 97.115.

Athenagoras even laughs at other men's attempts to have intercourse with Tharsia and seems to make light of her distress when he comes out of her bower and reports his experience there to a friend who is next: "Non potest melius: usque ad lacrimas!" ("It couldn't have been better: even tears!").⁸² Gower and Godfrey were both aware of Athenagoras's lack of integrity, and Gower even more poignantly so, as Archibald points out: "Gower is alone in introducing Athenagoras for the first time only when Apollonius' ship arrives, thus omitting the auction and his shameful visit to the brothel."⁸³ Indeed, Athenagoras's name is not mentioned until very late in Gower's story. Athenagoras first appears when he sends Tharsia to Apollonius to cheer him up.⁸⁴ Godfrey, preserving Athenagoras's attempt at having sex with Tharsia, gives Tharsia a powerful speech in which she shames Athenagoras and declares that his actions do not suit his rank: "Regula mercati contraria nobilitati, / Dedita luxuriis, gravis emula virginitati, / Me tibi prostituit, turpia lucra pati" ("The rules of trade are incompatible with those of nobility, / Having given yourself over to unbridled lust, you strove earnestly after my virginity, / He prostituted me to you, to suffer grievously for foul profits").⁸⁵ Athenagoras dutifully refrains from injuring the young girl, becomes her patron, and, importantly, does not encourage other customers to enter Tharsia's bower, as he does in the *Historia*. When Tharsia reminds Athenagoras of his identity and responsibilities as a king, he abstains from harming her. As in Godfrey's work, Gower presents characters who are either able to obtain eventual salvation or who are irredeemably tainted by sin. At the end of his grand work, Gower wanted to present his audience with a clear path to salvation.

⁸² *Historia*, 152--53.

⁸³ *Historia*, 70.

⁸⁴ Gower, *Confessio*, VIII.1622.

⁸⁵ Godfrey, *Pantheon*, stanza 117.136.137.

Another narrative device in both Godfrey and Gower is the figure of Fortune, which causes events and tests the characters' strength, thus demonstrating their chances for salvation. In both the *Pantheon* and the *Confessio*, characters are constantly presented by Fortune with situations in which they have the choice either to assert their identity or to lose it completely.⁸⁶ Archibald attests that Gower most likely took his inspiration for the significance of Fortune from Godfrey's *Pantheon*, rather than from the *Historia*, of which she says: "Fortuna is certainly present in [the *Historia*], though not particularly often invoked."⁸⁷ Fortune is an active agency in both Godfrey and Gower, with a particularly strong presence in the *Confessio*'s Book VIII. Antiochus immediately fails Fortune's test when Fortune takes his wife away, and thus he loses his identity as a husband:

Bot such fortune cam to honde
That deth, which no king mai withstonde,
Bot every lif it mote obeie,
This worthi queene tok aweie.⁸⁸

When Antiochus is presented with his daughter, nothing reminds him of his true identity as her father and the husband to her mother. In contrast, when in both the *Pantheon* and *Confessio* Apollonius meets his daughter again, he better survives Fortune's test of his kind parenthood. His daughter reminds him of his identity, just as she did with Athenagoras.⁸⁹ The moment in the narrative when Apollonius's personhood is less certain is when he is shipwrecked, however, and temporarily loses his sense of being a high-ranking noble. Apollonius cannot account for who he is and thus loses his rank. This is the first test with

⁸⁶ Donavin also points out a connection between God and Fortune and how Apollonius needs to realize that, ultimately, it is God who holds sway over Fortune. Donavin, *Incest Narratives*, 83.

⁸⁷ Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre*, 102, 192.

⁸⁸ Gower, *Confessio*, VIII.279--82.

⁸⁹ Godfrey, *Pantheon*, stanza 136.156.157; Gower, *Confessio*, VIII.1696--1701.

which Fortune presents Apollonius, and in both Godfrey and Gower, Apollonius's initial reaction is one of dismay, directed at the mutable goddess.⁹⁰ Apollonius's reaction at first even mirrors Antiochus's to his wife's death: Apollonius "made mochel mone," a phrase twice repeated.⁹¹ Both Godfrey and Gower, however, then seem to position Neptune as the cause for Apollonius's distress and loss of identity, at least in part, which shifts the blame partly away from Fortune.⁹²

Apollonius's loss of identity forces him to act with humility when he enters the court of Archistrates and realizes exactly what he has lost:

He sat and caste aboute his yhe
And sih the lordes in astat,
And with himself wax in debat
Thenkende what he hadde lore.⁹³

He can no longer compare himself in rank to the "lordes" of Archistrates' court, a fact that stands out very clearly in his mind. Godfrey also emphasizes this point by almost constantly referring to Apollonius as "naufagus" ("the shipwrecked one") rather than using his name after Apollonius has been shipwrecked.⁹⁴ In Godfrey, Apollonius makes the following statement about his loss of identity: "Qui fueram non sum, pelago quo nescio veni, / Naufragus egredior, nomen Neptunus ademit" ("Who I had been I am not, I do not know from which sea I have come, / I come forth as the shipwrecked one; Neptune has taken my name away").⁹⁵ Later, Tharsia repeats her father almost verbatim after her nurse reveals

⁹⁰ Ibid., stanzas 17 and 18; Gower, *Confessio*, VIII.585–592.

⁹¹ Gower, *Confessio*, VIII.614 and 633.

⁹² Godfrey *Pantheon*, stanzas 17 and 20; Gower, *Confessio*, VIII.622–23.

⁹³ Gower, *Confessio*, VIII.722–25.

⁹⁴ Godfrey, *Pantheon*, stanza 20.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

her parentage and Tharsia loses her previous identity: “Non sum que fueram” (“I am not who I had been”),⁹⁶ thus emphasizing the thematic importance of the loss and the recovery of selfhood. Russell A. Peck asserts that Apollonius suffers from a near constant threat to a sense of personhood: he is “a prince without a country, a husband without a wife, and a father without a child.”⁹⁷ Yet Apollonius does not “abdicat[e] [his] own sense of agency,”⁹⁸ but amends his situation through skill and reason. Even though Apollonius has lost his rank and wealth, he has not lost his memory of who he is and of what he is capable. His “stable identity”⁹⁹ is shown in the retention of his knowledge, allowing him to become his future wife’s tutor in musical skill;¹⁰⁰ for even if Apollonius has lost his outward identity, he has not lost his reason. Alastair Minnis is correct in pointing out that, despite the fact that Fortune sometimes may allot persons with a terrible fate, “the other side of the coin is that fortune sometimes smiles on ‘hem that ben of love trewe’,”¹⁰¹ a sentiment clearly reiterated in Godfrey’s words: “sic mala sunt reprobis, sic bona nata bonis” (“As thus the evil ones are repaid with false things, the good daughter is repaid with good things”).¹⁰² The wicked evil-doers who caused much woe to Tharsia and her father are punished with death, while Tharsia and her father live on happily ever after. Gower similarly stresses that after Thaise and

⁹⁶ Ibid., stanza 108.

⁹⁷ Russell A. Peck, “Introduction,” in *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell A. Peck (Toronto: University of Toronto in Association with the Medieval Academy of America, 1980), xxv.

⁹⁸ Robins, “Romance,” 171.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 199.

¹⁰⁰ Gower, *Confessio*, VIII.769.

¹⁰¹ A. J. Minnis, “Moral Gower and Medieval Literary Theory,” in *Gower’s Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. A.J. Minnis (Cambridge, UK: D.S. Brewer, 1983), 64; Gower, *Confessio*, VIII.2013--15.

¹⁰² Godfrey, *Pantheon*, stanza 158.180.181.

Apollonius are reunited, and their days of hardship are over, they are perpetually assured of Fortune's benevolence:

For this day forth fortune hath sworn
To sette him upward on the whiel;
So goth the world, now wo, now wel.¹⁰³

Fortune finally rewards their good character and ceases to test their identities when in peril or distress. When Apollonius at last recognizes Thaise and takes her into his arms, they reinforce each other's stable identities. They have demonstrated to each other and to Fortune that their true selves remain unperturbed by the situations they encounter. In the end, when Apollonius and Thaise are presented with the possibility of committing incest, they prove that they have not been corrupted.

In the scholarship of the past thirty years, Gower has gradually become known for his creative use of a multitude of sources.¹⁰⁴ I hope to have made a case for the study of Godfrey of Viterbo's *Pantheon*, an influence which Gower explicitly credits and a model for Gower's version of Antiochus's riddle, as an important framework for the *Confessio*'s "Tale of Apollonius of Tyre." Like the *Pantheon*, the *Confessio Amantis* presents the story as a moral *exemplum* with characteristics of the "mirror for princes" genre, and the two works have strong stylistic similarities. Like the *Pantheon*, Gower's "Tale of Apollonius of Tyre" features Fortune at pivotal moments in the plot. Beyond Book VIII, Gower probably uses the *Pantheon* as his source for the story of "Albinus and Rosamund" in Book I.¹⁰⁵ Therefore, a closer inspection of the *Pantheon* is necessary to gauge what other points of contact with the

¹⁰³ Gower, *Confessio*, VIII.1736–38.

¹⁰⁴ See Robert F. Yeager, "Did Gower Write Cento?" in *Recent Readings: Papers Presented at the Meetings of the John Gower Society at the International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, 1983-88*, ed. Robert F. Yeager, *Studies in Medieval Culture* 26 (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), 113–132.

¹⁰⁵ Yeager, *Poetic*, 145.

Confessio exist. Similar to other medieval encyclopaedic compendiums of stories, the *Pantheon* needs to be significantly more accessible to a modern audience. That way, scholars of medieval literature will be able to more fully answer the question: what else have we missed?

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