



Accessus:

A Journal of Premodern Literature and New Media

Accessus

Volume 5
Issue 2 *Gower Shorts*

Article 3

2019

“Als wel the lord as the schepherde, He broghte hem alle in good accord”: Harmonious Materialism in the Confessio Amantis

Roger A. Ladd

University of North Carolina at Pembroke, roger.ladd@uncp.edu

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Recommended Citation

Ladd, Roger A. (2019) “Als wel the lord as the schepherde, He broghte hem alle in good accord”: Harmonious Materialism in the Confessio Amantis,” *Accessus*: Vol. 5 : Iss. 2 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/accessus/vol5/iss2/3>

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**“Als wel the lord as the schepherde, He broghte hem alle in good accord”:
Harmonious Materialism in the Confessio Amantis**

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Georgiana Donavin and Eve Salisbury for giving this piece the chance to see the light of day and their help in the process. I would also like to thank the John Gower Society for the opportunity to present this work in 2019, and to thank R. F. Yeager for the inspiration for this particular argument.

“Als wel the lord as the schepherde, He broghte hem alle in good accord”¹: Harmonious Materialism in the *Confessio Amantis*¹

In 1990 R. F. Yeager argued that the *Confessio Amantis* is held together by the figure of Arion, a model for John Gower’s understanding of his role as a poet.² Describing Arion as a relatively obscure classical model for the social function of poetry as peacemaking,³ Yeager’s reading effectively ties both content and form of Gower’s work to the author’s persistent concern with the need for peace and social harmony. This broader goal of “universal peace”⁴ unifies Gower’s poetic vision in the sprawling *Confessio Amantis*, and particularly brings the beginning and ending of the poem into thematic alignment. Yeager’s approach to the poem stands on its own, but my particular interest for this essay arises from how his reading of the *Confessio Amantis* provides a valuable model for my own

¹ A version of this paper was originally presented in a John Gower Society-sponsored panel entitled “Revisiting John Gower’s Poetic: Papers in Honor of R. F. Yeager” at the 54th International Congress on Medieval Studies in Kalamazoo, Michigan, 2019.

² R. F. Yeager, *John Gower’s Poetic: The Search for a New Arion*, Publications of the John Gower Society II (Rochester: D. S. Brewer, 1990).

³ Yeager, *John Gower’s Poetic*, 239-40; 244.

⁴ Yeager, *John Gower’s Poetic*, 241.

ongoing project, an exploration of Gower's sublimation of his earlier estates-satire point of view into his frame-narrative approach to the *Confessio Amantis*.

Though the Prologue preserves a stripped-down version of estates satire, at least as compared to the *Vox Clamantis* and *Mirour de l'Omme*, the vast majority of the poem steps away from that model to create an encyclopedic vision of the Seven Deadly Sins as articulated through (love) story. As I have argued elsewhere, however, Gower's interest in social critique has not been replaced by an obsession with love, despite his placement of himself in the role of Amans and ultimately, in Yeager's argument, of Arion.⁵ Instead, Gower's concerns with society's flaws, so many of which had been economic in nature in his earlier work, are folded into these various love stories, transformed from a conventional critique of a single estate or sub-estate (like merchants or grocers) to an analysis of people's pervasive susceptibility to, among other things, the sins of materialism and avarice. With this broad pattern in mind, the figure of Arion opens up an examination of how such disparate social analyses embedded in stories contribute to Gower's vision of harmony – not just a political harmony leading to “pes” (Prol. 1059-61; “PP” *passim*),⁶ but an economic harmony perhaps more in tune

⁵ I have addressed this set of issues in a series of conference papers from 2012, primarily at the International Congress on Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo.

⁶ All citations of *Confessio Amantis* are taken from John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell A. Peck, Middle English Texts Series, 3 vols., 2nd ed.,

with Russell A. Peck's understanding of "common profit," which he defines as "the mutual enhancement, each by each, of all parts of a community for the general welfare of that community taken as a whole."⁷ This harmony is exemplified by the "lord and scheperde . . . in good accorde" of my title (Prol. 1064-65); conventionally pastoral as that image seems, in wool-producing England it also represents their interface with the international money economy, and cannot seem accidental. I will thus attempt to link some of the various economic and material references (such as Virgil's mirror, Echo, Jason,

(Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2004-13);

<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/peck-confessio-amantis-volume-1>
; <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/peck-gower-confessio-amantis-volume-2>

; < <https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/peck-confession-amantis-volume-3> >

Citations of "In Praise of Peace" are taken from John Gower, *The Minor Latin Works with "In Praise of Peace,"* ed. Michael Livingston, Middle English Texts Series (Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 2005),

<https://d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/publication/yeager-gower-the-minor-latin-works-with-in-praise-of-peace>

⁷ Russell A. Peck, *Kingship and Common Profit in John Gower's "Confessio Amantis"* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1978), xxi. He argues that "[i]t applies to the community of faculties within an individual man as well as the state of England with its individuals and its three estates. Each part has its natural rights. If one part deprives another, not only does the deprived part suffer from the onslaught but the oppressor is diminished too, for he loses the benefit of his larger self which he has affronted. To diminish another is to diminish oneself. Conversely, if one is capable of taking joy in another's success, and promotes that success for 'l'onour et le comun proufit' (*Mirour* 12905), he will himself grow and find a joy as great as his own successes hold."

Philomena, or even Apollonius of Tyre's grain donation) that pervade the *Confessio* into that sense of economic harmony, which would necessarily provide a foundation for the peace for which Gower strives as a poet.

As a starting point, however, it seems worth providing a brief recap of the role of Arion in the *Confessio*, and to some extent in Yeager's argument. For Gower, Arion appears as such only in the *Prologue*, which presents Arion as an exemplary poet whose harp brought peace between animals and also among humans; thus,

And every man upon this ground
Which Arion that time herde,
Als wel the lord as the schepherde,
He broghte hem alle in good acord;
So that the comun with the lord,
And lord with the comun also,
He sette in love bothe tuo
And putte away malencolie. (Prol. 1062-69)

Following as it does the formal estates satire of the rest of the *Prologue*, reading the "lord" and "comun" as their respective estates fits into that overall context,

and is a familiar model of social harmony; we see a similar harmony in more political terms as the antithesis to war in “In Praise of Peace:”

The werre bringth in poverté at hise hieles,
 Wherof the comon poeple is sore grieved;
 The werre hath set his cart on thilke whieles
 Wher that Fortune mai nocht be believed.
 For whan men wene best to have achieved,
 Ful ofte it is al newe to beginne:
 The werre hath no thing siker, thogh he winne. (“PP,” ll. 113-19.)

Yeager then argues that Gower returns to this imagery of peace through superior poetry (and thus to Arion) at the end of the *Confessio*, after Amans is revealed as Gower the poet. Given that Gower returns to images of harmony *in propria persona* after he is relieved of his role as a lover, this overlapping content leads Yeager to understand Gower’s poetic persona as ultimately Arionic.⁸ This identification reinforces Yeager’s complex understanding of Gower’s poetics, but my interest is primarily thematic, particularly in terms of estates satire. Estates satire, though ostensibly meant to correct the flaws it castigates, has in pragmatic

⁸ Yeager, *John Gower’s Poetic*, 265-67.

terms the narrative effect of dividing those various elements of society that it describes one by one. So, for example, when Gower's *Mirour de l'Omme* moves from vices and virtues to describe the various estates and sub-estates, such as the "prelatz" (prelates) (l. 18421), "Evesques" (bishops) (l. 19056+), "Curetz" (parish priests) (l. 20208+), "emperours" (emperors) (l. 21780+), "chivalers" (knights) (l. 23592+), "gens de loy" (men of law) (l. 24180+), "Marchans" (merchants) (l. 25176+), and "gens qui vivont d'artifice" (tradespeople) (l. 25501), Gower largely describes these groups in isolation rather than as parts of a larger society – at best they cluster within the larger framework of the Three Estates.⁹ We see such a direct poetic division in the *Prologue* of the *Confessio*, as well; starting with "knythode" (Prol.99), Gower laments a lack of harmony such that "Now stant the crop under the rote" (Prol.118); he moves on to "the lif of clerkes" (Prol.194) and "the comune" (Prol.499) before presenting the Dream of Nebuchadnezzar and long discourses on biblical prophecy and "Division" (Prol.967). The harmony of Arion, coming right after this distillation of estates satire as a poetic model for a divided society, then presents poetry as the potential antidote for that division.

⁹ All citations of the *Mirour* come from John Gower, *The Complete Works: The French Works*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, vol. 1 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899); a translation is available in John Gower, *The Mirour de l'Omme (The Mirror of Mankind)*, trans. William Burton Wilson, rev. Nancy Wilson Van Baak (East Lansing, MI: Colleagues Press, 1999).

This move matters, because a lingering question in Gower studies has remained his dramatic shift in focus between the estates satire of *Mirour de l'Omme* and *Vox Clamantis*, and the narrative anthology of the *Confessio Amantis*.¹⁰ My own conclusion considering this issue has been that Gower is participating (to some extent with Geoffrey Chaucer) in a move away from estates satire in large part out of recognition that as more potential audiences for such material developed (such as literate urban elites), the calling-out and division of traditional estates satire was at best counterproductive – people do not, as a rule, improve their behavior as a result of being yelled at.¹¹ Certainly after a brief flourishing in Gower's work and in the prologues of his and other larger works in the late fourteenth century, estates satire becomes relatively uncommon in England. The structure of the *Prologue* then encapsulates Gower's approach to this problem of how to correct kindly, by modeling a more positive approach with

¹⁰ Diane Watt has a useful discussion of this subject; she questions John H. Fisher's assertion that Gower's works represented a single project, and instead asserts that Gower's "conservatizing mode of production" and "destabilizing hermeneutic" create the apparent range in his literary productivity. Diane Watt, *Amoral Gower: Language, Sex, and Politics* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 151; John H. Fisher, *John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 135-36.

¹¹ Roger A. Ladd, "Selling Satire: Gower, Chaucer, and the End of the Estates," in *Critical Insights: Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. James M. Dean (Ipswich, MA: Salem/Grey House, 2017), 81-96.

the “good mesure” (Prol.1056) of Arion’s harp, following up on “the middel weie, . . . Somwhat of lust, somewhat of lore” (Prol.17-19) with which he started.

So if the idea were simply that Gower had grown tired of satire and division, and wanted to tell fun love stories instead, that would be one view of Gower’s career, albeit a rather silly one. Instead I would endorse Yeager’s claim that

Gower’s view of poetry as a powerful tool for moral and social reform brought him to reject all alternative approaches to the art. Writing for him was an accountable act, ultimately subject to the same scrutiny and judgment as other deeds performed by men. A poet . . . thus bears a responsibility, not only for the state of his own soul, but also to others, to keep them on the path with a right use of eloquence.¹²

Given this relatively lofty sense of Gower’s general purposes, and my own continued preoccupation with economic materialism, the question still remains of how such reform might for Gower be couched in economic terms without straying from the “middel weie” to the demonstrably ineffective *vox clamantis in*

¹² Yeager, *John Gower’s Poetic*, 66.

deserto.¹³ The Arion lines in the *Prologue* point the way in terms that Gower will build on throughout the *Confessio*: the choice of the “scheperde” to represent the commons with whom the lord is in agreement cannot be accidental in an English context. That wool was a primary English export is a commonplace; that the Lord Chancellor sat on a symbolic and ultimately eponymic woolsack in the House of Lords¹⁴ kept that primacy firmly in people’s minds. Gower himself later reinforces this connection in “In Praise of Peace,” when he associates wool with the vicissitudes of worldly activity:

Of the tenetz to winne or lese a chace,
 Mai no lif wite er that the bal be ronne:
 Al stant in God, what thing men schal purchace,
 Th'ende is in Him er that it be begonne.
 Men sein the wolle, whanne it is wel sponne,
 Doth that the cloth is strong and profitable,

¹³ *Mark* 1: 1-3 and *John* 1: 22-23; this phrase is well-known in Gower circles as the source for the title of the *Vox Clamantis*.

¹⁴ See, e.g., Michael L. Nash, “Crown, Woolsack and Mace: The Model Parliament of 1295” *Contemporary Review* 267 (November 1995): 237-41. See also Eileen Power, *Medieval People* (London: Methuen, 1924; repr. Mineola, NY: Dover, 2000), p. 120, or Emma Crewe and Sylvie Muller, “La Loyauté Dans Une Paire De Collants: Règles, Rites Et Symboles à La Chambre Des Lords,” *Ethnologie Française* 37.2 (2007): 243-54.

And elles it mai never be durable. (“PP,” 295-301)

This stanza combines the game of tennis with the weaving of wool as images of divine providence in daily life; the following line, that “The worldes chaunces uppon aventure / Ben evere sett” (“PP” 302-3), recalls some of the justification of trade profits through risk of the *Mirour de l’Omme*, which uses the terms “met en aventure” and “son argent adventurer” to describe mercantile risk.¹⁵ Thus to choose a shepherd as the representative of the third estate for Arion to charm into agreement with a “lord” is no neutral choice; in addition to potentially representing the profitable wool trade (from agricultural workers all the way up to the wealthy wool investors who underwrote the crown in positions like Collector of Customs),¹⁶ “schepherde” also invokes the Latin “pastor,” and thus the clergy

¹⁵ Gower writes in the *Mirour de l’Omme*, “La loy le voet et c’est droiture, / Qe qui se met en aventure / De perdre doit aici gaigner, / Qant sa fortune le procure: / Pour ce vous dy, cil qui sa cure / Mettre voldra pour marchander, / Et son argent adventurer, / S’il gaigne, en ce n’est a blamer, / Maisq’il le face par mesure / Sanz fraude” (The law allows, and it is only right, that he who can lose in a venture should also be allowed to gain from it when his fortune brings it about. Therefore I say to you that he who wants to become a merchant and risk his money is not to be blamed if he earns a profit, provided he earn it in moderation and without fraud) (ll. 25201-10).

¹⁶ See, e.g., Robert L. Baker, “The English Customs Service, 1307-1343: A Study of Medieval Administration,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* n.s. 51.6 (1961): 3-76. See also Pamela Nightingale, *A Medieval Mercantile Community: The Grocers’ Company & the Politics & Trade of London, 1000-*

who are otherwise curiously omitted from this vision of harmony.¹⁷ So here with this compact image of Arion and his happy mixed-estate audience, Gower presents an alternative to estates satire – rather than complaining about bad behavior, he can both model positive behavior and show a mix of positive and negative through the various narratives of the *Confessio*. Where economic issues like the wool trade had been isolated in the *Mirour de l’Omme*,¹⁸ here we will see them incorporated into the general structure of the various narratives that make up the *Confessio*.

Such economic references abound in the *Confessio*, and take a variety of different forms, which I cannot list here in full. To present some examples, though, it is no surprise that they are particularly thick on the ground in Book 5, on Avarice. In the “Tale of Virgil’s Mirror,” for example, we see avarice displaced to the “emperour Crassus” (5.2068-69), whose overt greed for gold

1485 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 92, 296-97, on powerful Grocers in that role.

¹⁷ Gower uses the term in his discussions of clergy in *Vox Clamantis*, though Stockton generally translates it as shepherd. John Gower, *The Complete Works: The Latin Works*, ed. G. C. Macaulay, vol. 4 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902); e.g. III.81; John Gower, *The Major Latin Works of John Gower*, trans. Eric W. Stockton (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1962), 119.

¹⁸ The “wool paean,” of which Eileen Power’s translation is somewhat more compelling than Wilson’s (Power, 123-24 vs. Wilson, 333), is a well-known discussion of the power of wool for the English: “O leine, dame de noblesce” etc. (*MO* II. 25369-429).

ultimately undermines his own rule, the safety of Rome, and any aspirations toward historical accuracy Gower might have harbored.¹⁹ Notably, though that story addresses greed as a danger to the state, it does not associate that greed with a social grouping – Crassus is greedy because he is greedy, not because he is emperor. The “Tale of Jason and Medea” similarly displaces behaviors associated with trade in the estates-satire tradition to classical figures not associated with trade, in this case mythologizing faithlessness and breaking of contracts, both of which are toxic to trade. The choice to make the broken contract a marriage contract fits effectively into the love-and-relationship focus of the *Confessio*, and also with this traditional story. This text reinforces an association of that sin with greed, and the need for trust to create a functional society. The “Tale of Echo” and the “Tale of Tereus, Procne, and Philomena” then more directly incorporate elements associated with trade – with “The Tale of Echo,” we have Genius’s direct critique of usury in terms reminiscent of his estates satires, but then for the tale itself, Gower limits economic elements of his critique to language choices that echo antimercantile satire in the critique of Echo’s role as a go-between; as one can also see in the case of Jason, trust here is an element conspicuous by its absence, with clear consequences for social institutions like marriage, even for the

¹⁹ For a relatively detailed and historically proximate overview of the historical Crassus’ career, see Plutarch, *Lives*, vol. 3 (Cambridge, MA: Loeb, 1915), 315-421.

gods. With the “Tale of Tereus, Procne, and Philomena,” Gower blurs the distinction between material and carnal desire that he would presumably have understood to lie behind rape. The centrality of silk-weaving as a commodity in the story keeps a London audience, familiar with the silkwomen’s relationships with the Mercers’ Company,²⁰ mindful of the estate satires associated with such material desires, without having to feature any greedy mercantile characters – as with Crassus and Virgil’s *Mirror*, Tereus’s avarice undermines the state and also humanity’s ability to get along – his violence breeds only further violence and death, making harmony impossible.

My last example then comes from outside Book 5, and has the advantage that it is also one that Yeager discusses at some length as a “capstone” to the *Confessio*.²¹ It also reinforces the general pattern that Gower establishes of using the flaws and strengths of royalty in the tales as a recurring metaphor for the flaws and strengths of a larger society seeking its common profit – Yeager makes this point himself, arguing that “Apollonius, beset by evil fortune and worse men, offers us a model for ‘ethical self-governance’ applicable equally to individual

²⁰ See also “The London Mercers’ Company, London Textual Culture, and John Gower’s *Mirour de l’Omme*,” *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 6 (2010): 127-50.

²¹ Yeager, *John Gower’s Poetic*, 229. On the Apollonius story more broadly, see Elizabeth Archibald, *Apollonius of Tyre: Medieval and Renaissance Themes and Variations* (Rochester, NY: D. S. Brewer, 1991).

and king.”²² This use of a king as a metaphor for the state effectively develops the body-metaphor image of the Dream of Nebuchadnezzar in the *Prologue* as a less fanciful and more effective social critique. A key element in this tale is when Apollonius dabbles in an international commodities market by donating a shipload of wheat to the starving people of Tharse, and “taking ‘riht noght’ in exchange.”²³ Yeager, arguing that the Apollonius story manages to wrap up and reject all of the Deadly Sins, characterizes Apollonius’s generosity: “his act is pure, a liberal demonstration of commonality with those about whom he knows nothing save that they too are men, and in need.”²⁴ Certainly such largess with no money or goods in exchange is a familiar antidote to avarice,²⁵ though I have argued elsewhere that this gift does yield some practical non-material benefits for Apollonius, in the sense of his local reputation and subsequent shelter from

²² Yeager, *John Gower’s Poetic*, 217.

²³ Yeager, *John Gower’s Poetic*, 221; citing *Confessio Amantis* 8.559.

²⁴ Yeager, *John Gower’s Poetic*, 221.

²⁵ The *Mirour* opposes “Franchise” (Generosity) generally to “Covoitise” (Avarice) (L. 15180+), and her daughter “Largesce” (Largess) against “Escharceté” (Stinginess) (l. 15900+). This subdivides both virtue and vice a little more than one sometimes sees, complicating the common opposition of covetousness and largess. For example, William Langland lists “Largenesse” (Largess) as the virtue opposed to “Coveitise” in *Piers Plowman* (A.VI.112; B.V.622; C.VII.273). William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A Parallel-Text Edition of the A, B, C and Z Versions*, 2nd edition, vol. 1, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2011).

assassins in Tharse.²⁶ Again using royals as a sort of metonymy for a healthy state or community, Gower is able to show through Apollonius's actions specific virtues and characteristics that he would associate with a healthy community. He can also embed a degree of social critique into this exchange of personal profit for the common profit, by tacitly opposing the royal Apollonius with the "burgeis" (8.543) Strangulio, without having to resort to the sort of direct critique of his earlier satires. Apollonius's tale is of course a familiar one, and in Gower's hands it becomes a model for economic behavior where an embodiment of the polity contributes quite literally to the common profit by foregoing personal material profit.

Then when Gower returns to Arionic material at the end of the poem, direct critique can reappear; in the concluding "prayer for England," he is not quite taking an estates approach, but certainly trade and economic engagement are among those problems that require prayer:

Men sein that trouthe hath broke his bond
And with brocage is goon aweie,

²⁶ Roger A. Ladd, "Gower's Gifts," in *John Gower in Late Medieval Iberia: Manuscripts, Influences, Reception*, ed. Ana Sáez-Hidalgo and R. F. Yeager (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2014), 236-37.

So that no man can se the weie
 Wher for to fynde rightwisnesse. (8.3032-35)

Brocage is one of those trade-related words we have seen earlier in the *Confessio*, in the tale of Echo when Jupiter had Echo's aid in his infidelities "with fals brocage" (5.4607); Gower pairs it with usury twice in Book 5 (5.4607; 5.7618). The term is not one with very positive connotations; this is one of many terms fitting a broader pattern in the *Confessio* where Gower regularly plays upon the range of meaning of cognates between Middle English and Anglo-Norman. With that slippage in mind, it seems relevant that the *Anglo-Norman Dictionary* (hereafter *AND*) defines "brocage" as "brokerage," "corrupt jobbing of offices," "bribery, corruption," and "maintenance,"²⁷ while the *Middle English Dictionary* (*MED*) concurs with an emphasis on bribery; an additional Middle English sense applies to the Echo story, including "matchmaking, procuring."²⁸ Relatively antimercantile language continues:

²⁷ *Anglo-Norman Dictionary, AND² Online edition*. <http://www.anglo-norman.net/D/brocage>, accessed 30 Apr 2019, s.v. "brocage."

²⁸ "(a) Transaction of business, esp. by an agent or intermediary; brokerage; (b) clandestine or dishonest mediation, as by bribery, shady dealing; bribery, a bribe; (c) the offering of a bribe (to an intermediary);" *Middle English Dictionary*. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED6130>, accessed 30 Apr 2019, s.v. "brokage."

And if men sechin sikernesse
 Uppon the lucre of marchandie,
 Compasement and tricherie
 Of singuler profit to wyne,
 Men seyn, is cause of mochil synne,
 And namely of division. . . . (8.3036-41)

Though Gower does use the term “marchandie,” which invokes estates satire, he also emphasizes the term “men” – this temptation is everyone, not just one social segment. Certainly the terminology here is not in favor of trade; “lucre” is cited by *MED* first in the *Confessio* (earlier in Book 4); and *AND* adds the sense “illicit gain,” and the familiar collocation “filthy lucre.”²⁹ “Tricherie” is similarly unsavory in both Anglo-Norman and Middle English, including senses of both treachery and trickery (bearing in mind that fraud in the *Mirour* was “Triche”);³⁰

²⁹ *Middle English Dictionary*. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED26290>, Accessed 30 Apr 2019, s.v. “lucre.” *AND² Online edition*. <http://www.anglo-norman.net/D/lucre>, accessed 30 Apr 2019, s.v. “lucre.”

³⁰ *Middle English Dictionary* <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/dictionary/MED46878>, Accessed 30 Apr 2019; *AND² Online edition*. <http://www.anglo-norman.net/D/tricherie>, accessed 30 Apr 2019; s.v. tricherie/trecheri(e). For *Triche*, see *MO* ll. 25238ff.

“synne” speaks for itself. So on the one hand we have a bit of a departure from Gower’s commitment to “preie hierafter for the pes” (8.2913), roughly one hundred lines ago, but on the other hand, he does go straight from this brief return to satire to his concluding prayer. What we see here, at the end, is perhaps an understanding of the limitations of Arion as a model of unity and both literal and figurative harmony. For the most part, the *Confessio* has allowed Gower to shift his economic concerns away from finger-pointing and toward a more comprehensive sense of how our economic interactions need to be part of how we all get along, in large part by making extensive use of royalty and similarly prominent figures as main protagonists, so that their concerns map directly to those of the communities they are supposed to rule. Gower’s anxieties about the power of temptation, however, clearly linger – this return to direct satire at the end of the *Confessio* resembles much of the focus of “In Praise of Peace,” so perhaps he was concerned that his more mannered and indirect approach in the *Confessio* might have slipped by the more obtuse members of his audience.³¹

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³¹ He would, in this, be in large part in agreement with Geoffrey Chaucer, whose concerns about mercantile readers I address in Roger A. Ladd, ““(Mis)Reader in *The Canterbury Tales*.” *Studies in Philology* 99 (2002): 17-32.

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