John Gower: The Minor Latin Works

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John Gower: The Minor Latin Works

Almost all of Gower’s minor Latin works are late, dating from the last two decades of his life, between 1388 and his death in 1408. For the most part, the poems deal with the same materials that occupied him in the Mirour de l’Omme and the Vox Clamantis, that is, the many moral flaws of English society. Some of them, indeed, recycle substantial numbers of lines from the Vox. De Lucis Scrutinio and Carmen super Multiplici Viciorum Pestilencia derive from the same moral outrage and corrective motivation that impelled the poet to the composition of the earlier, major poems. O Deus Immense, O Recolende, and Rex Celi Deus are driven by the same instructional urges that led Gower to write the lengthy speculum principis to Richard in Book 6 of the Vox Clamantis. The addressee is now, however, Henry IV, to whose cause Gower increasingly and then wholeheartedly commits himself from at least the aftermath of the Revenge Parliament of 1397 until the end of his life. Much of the advice offered Henry is recycled from the earlier poems, in which it was held out to Richard, a process that at least indicates consistent standards for kingship.

Several poems, Est Amor and Ecce Patet Tensus, warn the reader against the dangers of sensual love, a topic exhaustively covered as well in most of Gower’s major poems throughout his career, most famously in the Confessio Amantis. Three poems, De Lucis Scrutinio, Quicquid Homo Scribat (In Fine), and the Epistola ad Arundel, deal with visual issues that derive in part or whole from the poet’s own encroaching blindness, the pressing concerns of which led Gower into disquisitions on the scarcity of true guiding lights in this world and the difficulty of seeing both literally and figuratively.1 Commentary on clergy who have purchased their curacies for profit, lost their way, or been neglectful of their function as ecclesiastical shepherds, a constant

concern of the major poems, occupies him in *Cultor in Ecclesia* and *Presul Ouile Regis*. *Dicunt Scripture* and *Orate pro Anima* (*Armigeri Scutum*) are funerary verses written at the very end of life and concerned with spiritual last matters.²

From a technical perspective, the minor poems show considerable concern with poetic variation and experimentation, in which Gower seems increasingly interested with the passage of time. They fall into three groups that, it has been argued, represent chronological stages of poetic practice:³

1. Poems in the elegiac meter of the *Vox Clamantis*, comprised of distichs consisting of a dactylic hexameter line followed by a dactylic pentameter (*Rex Celi Deus, Ecce Patet Tensus*),

2. Dactylic hexameter poems with various internal rhyme schemes, e.g. leonine hexameters (*O Recolende, De Lucis Scrutinio, Est Amor, O Deus Immense*),

3. Elegiac poems with internal, e.g. leonine, rhymes (*Quicquid Homo, Cultor in Ecclesia, Dicunt Scripture*).

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² The Latin text of the poems is available in volume 4 of G. C. Macaulay, ed. *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899–1902), which we have consulted, and the edition with translations of R. F. Yeager (cited *infra*), which we have followed. The differences between Macaulay’s Latin text and Yeager’s are minor and the reader can follow our translations with ease in either edition. Because Yeager’s translations do not attempt to recreate Gower’s poetic forms, we decided another version in English was worth the effort, although we have not attempted to recreate Gower’s rhymes. These are essentially impossible in English, which lacks the multiple recurring inflectional endings of Latin.
The *Carmen super Multiplici Viciorum Pestilencia* can be considered the pivot point in Gower’s poetic development, containing as it does features of all three types. The sections on Heresy, Lust, and Perjury / Greed, borrowed and repurposed in large measure from the *Vox Clamantis*, are in elegiac distichs. The section on Pride and the introductions and conclusions for all of the sections are in leonine hexameters, with the ends of paragraphs marked by a line of leonine pentameter. The *Carmen* can be viewed as an experiment from the late 1390s in which Gower combined elegiac lines from the *Vox Clamantis* with a new elaborate leonine style that will reach its full development in the *Cronica Tripertita*. See Appendix B for further discussion of poetics. By way of illustrating how Gower borrows from his own works, Appendix C tabulates the lines from the *Vox Clamantis* that comprise much of the *Carmen super Multiplici Viciorum Pestilencia*. Appendix A contains two Latin poems by another poet, perhaps Ralph Strode, that have found their way into the corpus of Gower’s own poetry.
I Send My Shafts

Ad Mundum Mitto appears in a number of manuscripts of the Vox Clamantis, to which it is accordingly inextricably linked, sometimes accompanied by the figure (in two variants) of an archer taking aim at a map of the world, probably meant to represent Gower himself. In all likelihood it slightly postdates the final form of the Vox Clamantis and was added to it at some subsequent point in the production of that poem’s manuscripts. In a way, Ad Mundum Mitto can be considered a sort of companion piece to Ecce Patet Tensus, in which Cupid shoots arrows that cause those who are struck to behave badly. In Ad Mundum Mitto, Gower’s archer, a conventional figure for the satirist, shoots arrows that target and eliminate those whose conduct indicates their commitment to problematic behaviors. He is, if the figure may be allowed, an anti-Cupid, a virtuous human acting to cleanse and correct a sinful world. The poem encapsulates in four brief lines (two elegiac distichs) Gower’s lifelong view of his purpose in writing, and for that reason we give it pride of place.

I send my shafts at the world whenever I shoot,
Yet no dart goes where good people would be.
But I do wound trespassers who live wickedly;
Let their accomplice then look to himself.

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An Inquiry into the Light

Considering its play with the tropes of light and darkness, sight and blindness, *De Lucis Scrutinio* can perhaps be seen as having reference to Gower’s early visual decline, which led eventually to something like legal blindness in the modern sense rather than the total blindness of Milton, which was incapacitating in a way that Gower seems not to have experienced, given his continued literary activity for some time after its onset, apparently right up to his death. Perhaps we can speculate that his blindness was the macular degeneration or glaucoma that commonly afflicts the elderly today and no doubt did also in the Middle Ages.

However, *De Lucis Scrutinio* is not really about his vision, for Gower uses blindness and visual difficulty as devices that allow him to search throughout English society for a guiding lamp, i.e. Christ, in a philosophical and spiritual sense. He does not find that lamp at any level in the secular or cloistered Church, rulers, the aristocracy, knighthood, the legal profession, the mercantile community, or the commoners, urban or rural. The papacy is split by the Great Schism of 1378, and the world has the rapt attention of the clergy. Secular rulers have failed to step in and provide the strength and guidance necessary to heal the Church and help it find its true path. The nobility are caught up in the honors of their station and have forgotten the accompanying burdens whose concerns justify their privilege. Knights have become mercenaries fighting for money, not the protection of the Church or the nation, to say nothing of the widows and orphans traditionally entrusted to them. The law is for sale to the highest bidder, and the merchants, driven by Usury and Fraud, are committed only to their profits and not their legitimate role as the providers of life’s necessities for the people’s well-being. The members of the urban common class are criminals of various sorts, and the fields of the countryside are covered in darkness as a result of rural misconduct. Gower tells us at the poem’s end that he finds his way like a blind man feeling for the path, but all the poem’s concern with vision seems
to be as much a trope as an autobiographical revelation. *De Lucis Scrutinio* is not so much about the poet’s blindness as it is about England’s darkness.

The poem’s purpose, therefore, is to survey the moral landscape of English society to see if a guiding light through its darkness can be found anywhere.\(^5\) The title and the opening prose statement suggest that we should consider *De Lucis Scrutinio* a sort of legal investigation whose purpose is to determine the facts necessary to call attention to the existence of *infama* and perhaps support the prosecution of a case by *inquisitio*. The word *scrutinium* is employed in various contexts in law and can be an ecclesiastical visitation by an inspecting superior, a viewing of contested grazing lands, an investigation held on the site of property that is the subject of legal action, and the like. It was a common feature of the legal systems operative in England in the late fourteenth century and continues in ecclesiastical use in the modern era to designate the examination of catechumens and candidates for sainthood or high office.

The poem offers little guidance toward a date.\(^6\) It may derive from the mid-1390s, when Gower was reworking parts of the *Vox Clamantis* that contain much of the same material. It is worth noting that by 1399 the poet is openly asserting his blindness and he would perhaps have employed his own visual decline to a greater extent if it had been further advanced at the time he wrote *De Lucis Scrutinio*.


Here begins a treatise about an inquiry into the light which the darkness of the vices, alas!, has extinguished for a long time, so that, as in the Gospel, “He who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes.” [John 12:35]

Note that the lamp of those shines least whom, advanced in the Church by the Anti-pope, Avarice enriches.

Alas! since our land’s been obscured by deep darkness,
Hardly any place has a clear human pathway.
Should you go to Rome to clarify your vision,
Take a wondrous lamp, because Rome now has two popes.
And if you should seek out the lights of the clergy,
You’ll find their lamp, discarded, beneath a bushel.
The world shields the prelate’s offices from wisdom;
There is no light in the presence of Simon’s bull.
His course is vile who enters the sheepfold that way.
He who disdains lights will not well discern the light.
A dark head does nothing bright with its limbs, and thus
A blind man has with him a man blind to himself.

About the light of a professed order.

A professed order won’t put you on the bright steps
You wish for, which its shadow carefully avoids.
In cloistered orders even more manifestly
The light has faded that a hateful mind won’t know.
The moral light of the priest, too, has become dark;
The bright day passes away and no lamp abides.
For lamps there are japes, idleness, harlots, taverns;
Their cover often lends its aid to the vices.
The idea of light dies out and roiling fog,
Which also eclipses lights, engulfs the temple,
And instead of the good shepherds whom Christ before
Had chosen, the world has now ordained a choir.

Note that, if the lamp of charity were borne devoutly in the hand of kings, the Church, now divided, would be prudently reformed with their help, and by their valor the assault of the pagans upon Christ’s territories would also be driven far off.

If we probe the light of the world’s present rulers,
We see earth grown dim by their wars, without a light.
So that the law not die, Rome wants kings on its side,
So the father might learn what the mother believes.
Kings would correct today’s papal schism if they
Observed Christ’s laws, but having two popes is the fad.
A regal light would most certainly suit the Church,
Whereby God’s blessed house could live in hope of peace.
By the witness of pagan gods in furious war,
Faith rarely flourishes where regal light grows dark.
We’ve but heard such things, and we know them to be true,
But the mind’s eye does not see them by our reign’s light.
You must seek further if you wish to have the light,
For David titled “lights” things that were dark to him.

About the light of the peerage.

If instead you would search the realm’s elite for light,
Note that the times by them are not replete with joy,
And when you would proceed, you’ll feel your way, because
None will see clearly when hail comes from the whirlwind.
Without light, blind riches misrepresent themselves;
Who has them scarce sees where he goes before he falls.
Thus the elites’ privileged path is not without care.
Honor, which comes from onus, should look to its deeds;
But he who these days views current circumstances
In the world of privilege, won’t see true lights shining.

About the light of knights and others who follow wars.

If I should investigate the warriors’ lights,
I’ll find mercenaries poor bearers of a lamp.
Lechery, waste, and rapine are doctrines for them,
And they do not seek brightness but instead bloodshed.
Thus the soldier, guilty by his fault, does not see
The light, whence his sort wanders, benighted, the world.

About the light of those who practice law.

If we search the law, we will not find the light there.
In fact, force or will stir rights to be rebellious.
The judge whom Mammon guides won’t shine on the people,
And he often twists Justice around so she’s blind.
He grants rights without right if coins speak in his ear;
The light in his face becomes dark when the gold shines.
Every legist lives, as it were, subject to law
Which eclipses our rights with the gleam from a purse.
About the light of the merchants.

If we search out the lights of the merchants’ morals,
We won’t find light among the burghers, where Fraud lives.
Usury’s sweet shape, which the rich man possesses,
Diverts attention from that shape’s masked face, disguised.
If deceit in your town could possess its own seals,
Honest men would rarely repay what greed provides.
Thus big shots cheat the little people all the time,
Whence beneath the folk’s mutter the urban throngs groan.
The wealthiest citizens wander without light,
And since they lack faith, the light of peace fades in town.

About the light of the commoners, which maintains the nation.

If I search my land, I don’t expect to find light,
For the people’s way is obscured by cruel darkness.
Here parched, without morals, the folk lack all reason,
Whose Christ scarcely has a sect that’s subject to him.
There are others whom the world considers special,
The thieves, plunderers, murderers, and mutineers,
And there are certain hirelings, enticed by money,
Whom the assize, cut off from light, makes perjurers.
There is no rustic hope in any countryside,
Where the darksome fields grow yet darker without light.
Thus everyone now seeks the enticing worldly
Shadows, and prayers are not directed toward the light.
Thus the world is first, and if God could only be
Second, there would yet be some sort of light in hope.
But now it’s like God’s completely gone from the folk;
Absent its duke, the world’s way erodes without light.

Here at the end, bewailing the darkness, he prays God for the hoped-for light.

O weakened by the stigma of manifold guilt,
Every class in the world now stands as if crooked.
However, when I lament others that are lost,
Wandering lawless, blind, I beat my own breast.
As a blind man won’t know where to go while he toils,
So my mind, which tearful prays, searches out its road.
And since I know I’m going to the light’s utmost,
I now walk the road by which I’ll reach it at death.
May you, who formed the light and created the dark,
Forgive me my sins and therefore grant me your light.  
Then when at last I seek my resting place on earth,  
Bear me the candle by which I’ll find salvation.  
Gower writes these things while he can search out the light.  
He will die in the hope he will reach the light’s joys.  
May Christ grant him the light’s solace. Amen.
A Poem about the Multiple Plague of the Vices

The Carmen super Multiplici Viciorum Pestilencia can be dated with some precision because Gower tells us that it was written in the twentieth year of Richard II (22 June 1396 to 21 June 1397). There would seem to be no reason to doubt the assertion. The poem follows upon the revisions of the Vox Clamantis that occupied the poet in the 1390s, which would help explain why there is not only a great deal of overlapping content with the earlier poem but as well a great deal of borrowing from it. The Carmen has been considered incomplete because it does not survey all the deadly sins, but the structure of the poem seems complete and the ending is satisfactory.\(^7\) The poem is, in all likelihood, finished as it is.

The Carmen opens with a brief exposition of confession, since the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 one of the two standard canonical means of expiating the wickedness that the introduction’s conclusion tells us has overwhelmed the world. Confession constitutes the inner forum of canon law, the spiritual space of the individual within which the confessor guides the sinner in a personal “legal” procedure to the acknowledgment of secret sin that is necessary for forgiveness.\(^8\) The prose headnote that precedes the beginning of the poem then suggests a procedure in canon law, the external forum that is trial before an Inquisitor leading possibly to formal punishment. The poet will function as an agent (procurator / proctor, an advisory attorney) for the practitioners of theological medicine who have allowed this plague to inflict its sores upon the faithful. He will witness to those sores in a lengthy libellus (the appropriate term


\(^8\) Sin that has come to the attention of the public through widespread \textit{fama} is dealt with in an \textit{inquisitio specialis} conducted, for the most part, by episcopal authority acting \textit{ex officio}. See the discussion in Henry Ansgar Kelly, \textit{Criminal-Inquisitorial Trials in English Church Courts} (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2023), 5–61. The distinction between the two fora is blurred, and the privilege of the inner forum violated, when an inquisition compels public confession.
for the presentation of the charges in ecclesiastical / civil procedure, and then call upon
(interpellate) the theological doctors for the cure, which would be their reaffirmation of the
central tenets of the faith. The Carmen thus aligns itself in its poetic strategy with the De Lucis
Scrutinio, which presents itself as an inquest. Gower’s defense of confession is likely a response
to the Lollard attack upon the sacrament.

The poem immediately moves to an attack upon Lollardy, apparently the foremost danger
presently confronting the English Church, presented as a liminal heresy that occurs at the
threshold of orthodoxy, where the heights of legitimate doctrine sink into the depths of the
unacceptable.9 The idea of Lollardy as belief that becomes heresy when it goes beyond the pale
may be the consequence of Gower’s agreement with a number of its calls for reform. Lollards
were not the only critics of the Church in the late fourteenth century and there was widespread
agreement about the misbehavior of the clergy, the harmful consequences of wealth upon the
Church, papal arrogance, and so on. In another of Gower’s favorite figures, the Lollards become
imagistically the biblical tares (lollia in ML spelling) that contaminate the grain that comprises
the faithful.

After Lollardy, Gower takes up, in turn, Pride, Lust, Perjury, and Avarice to round off his
review of the manifold vices. His conclusions are familiar. Pride is rampant throughout the land,
evidenced by the manner in which people dress and act, and is proof of the devil’s presence. Lust
is the expression of sensual love that vies with true spiritual love and enslaves its participants

9 Parliament has not yet legislated definitively against Lollardy at the time Gower writes. The
statute Contra Lollardos (2 Henry IV. c. 15) will be promulgated in 1401, although the lack of
specific legislation did not prevent the prosecution of Lollards. However, the first successful
action against a Lollard would seem to be the case of William Sawtrey, who was tried by Arundel
in February 1401 and subsequently executed, probably on March 2, even though the statute, then
under consideration by parliament, is not dated until March 10. See the discussion in Kelly, 229-37.
after stripping them of their rational capacity. Perjury is a bit of a surprise in a list of the vices, but it is linked to Avarice and used to show how the law has been led astray by those who, like Judas, take money to betray justice. The poem’s conclusion urges the reader to bring peace to the world by following God’s law, this being apparently the wisdom that the canonical proctor promised us in the poem’s beginning. “Whatever is, is right.”

**Behold the following poem about the manifold plague of the vices with which our localities were badly infested in the time of Richard II.**

They’re not forgiven who do not truly confess,  
As that is the way appointed to renew faith.  
Let those who understand this speak in their own words,  
Lest the law that hallows Christ be violated.  
It has been shown virtue is so vitiated  
That scarce anybody can claim to be sinless.  
Hence my mind, which is often heavy, is saddened  
When it contemplates the sin that so long persists.  
But since it hopes that the true faith is still alive,  
My pen is prepared to write down what God enjoins,  
In order to describe why the world has so changed.  
The cause, here given, is lo! wickedness.

**Our sores have infected and putrefied with the appearance of folly, but before death by disease suddenly marks our end, we ought to investigate, by searching the sores wisely with all diligence, the remedy of wisdom. Whence I, who am deeply saddened, not a doctor but medicine’s proctor, lamenting the gravity of such a great danger, propose to testify with clear evidence to the sores putrefied by major corruption, so that I may then consequently call upon the doctors for deliverance. In the twentieth year of King Richard the Second.**

**Against the devil’s cunning in the case of Lollardy.**

I’ll first describe the sin that appears nowadays  
At the threshold where the heights fade beneath the depths.  
I don’t know why the folk cede their right to heaven,  
When laymen would resolve settled matters of faith  
That God conceived and man received for the keeping.  
Now the people weaken more than keep the Scriptures,  
Whence I think to write a few things plainly.

Harvesting tares contaminates the grain itself,
And those who do it grieve the granaries.
The seeds of faithlessness, dispersed through the Church’s
Sacred Fields, spread lies and confound the faith.
Wickedness’s founder, the first foul apostate,
First infected the hosts of the angels.
And after he dashed our parents from Eden’s seat,
He made the living liable to death.
The sly serpent does not yet desist here on earth
From sowing yet more tares in Christ’s harvest.
Lo! he sends a new sect that sings many errors
In the folk’s ears to the faith’s injury.
Thus rears an old heresy, like Jovinian’s,
Whence today’s faith laments its defilement.
Pretending good faith, it puts on an honest face,
All the more carefully to cloak its fraud.
Under its coarse wool it wears finely spun linen;
Its face’s candor hides its guileful heart.
Such a one will corrupt all the dough with old yeast,
Who strews and stirs novelties you must doubt;
The more it casts its spell, the more you must plug up
Your ears and slam shut the gates of your heart.
Don’t believe, in your simplicity, all you hear;
Beware newfangledness false authors teach.
Taking no novelties, depart their fantasies;
As your father believed, tend to his ways.
The true faith of Christ does not waver; nay, it gives
The faithful to believe with their heart’s love.
Faith won’t avail where experience provides “the facts,”
But hope in Christ requires only him.
True faith seeks whatever’s true and merits all things;
True faith can hold what is held possible.
And faith gives the proofs of things that cannot be known,
Which cannot be grasped by word nor reason.
Submit your mind to faith, since a mortal likeness
Can’t grasp the eternal judge’s mysteries.
Since he wished to create alone, he wished alone
To know, and he shared this work with no one.
What’s one spark to the sun, or one drop to the sea,
Or what can ashes be to the heavens?
Sorrow, death, and tears do not know happiness, life
And joys, nor do humans know God’s business.
Shadows don’t receive the sun; blind people, the light,
Our lowly minds can’t take the heights of God’s.
Of course, you ought never probe the splendid mystery
Of the Holy Spirit, which you can’t reach.
Or, since it’s not for us to know the world’s ages,
Why do we strain to know the creation?
To fathom proven faith by means of our reason
Cannot be a task for human powers.
It’s not a human task that we transcend the stars,
Which mortals cannot attain by reason.
Virtue’s conveyance alone pierces to the heights;
It flashes past the stars, abides in God.
The one who acts wisely should be cautiously wise;
Let him ask that he be given true faith.
Let one entrust to faith what one can’t to reason;
Let a firm faith give what reason cannot.
Believe only what the Church teaches, don’t desire
To know anything more than you’re given.
It’s enough to believe, where there’s no way to know;
No one’s able to know the Lord’s power.
God is omnipotent, and one who won’t believe
In his omnipotence denies he’s God.
Thus you ought to believe that Christ was incarnate
From a virgin’s womb, who is God and man.

Do you want to be saved? Pray, believe, strive to fear;
The law bids us do so without complaint.
Let your knowledge be sound, for the Messiah damns
Notions that impart diverse heresies.
The Lollards have been sowing divisions lately,
Aside from what Fate brought in Richard’s time.
Let husbandmen prevent their planting in churches
And rush to purge thistles, lest the rose die.

Against the cruelty of the mind in the case of Pride.

I lack the wit, I am unable to describe
All the misdeeds by pride that have been told to me.
At first it was the root of the accursed one’s sin,
Because of whom condemned transgressors have perished.
The sword of Michael hurled him down from the heavens,
From the supernal light to the infernal dark.
Paradise offered him no promise of a place
Of repose, where he would have true joys for himself.
Thus, since deceived he could not be elsewhere received,
He requested the world that he could live in it.
Though delaying, that proud one came at the time set,
Whom my sad thought affirms to be in these our lands.
Where shall we put him, the foe whom we always have?
For his coming infects all our dwellings the more.
Praise does not illuminate the realms of the proud,
Where vain pride will lead; their vestiture teaches this,
When vain people can have their apparel prepared
Not for mortals, but angels who fly forth on wings.
These days a soldier’s form provides the poor man’s norm.
As his clothing witnesses, he is proud and vain;
His appearance will show he has a wicked heart,
And for his heart’s error his fate will lack honor.
It’s thus best we not go about with such comrades,
That we be restored, prudent, to health in the world.
David knew this well, that God hates those that are base,
And himself a psalmist wrote these things about them:
“He has pushed proud powerful spirits off their thrones,
And exalted the meek, whom he has always loved.”
The vain man will not prevail, whom vain pride attends;
Vain pride will lead him whence no Grace will return him.
Indeed, this sin gives waters from Acheron’s spring,
From which the vain, as it were, drink death every day.
Everything born is vitiated by this vice,
By which vain persons have their world yet more impure.
But they who would balance this with a judicious
Mind’s weight, I think that they would get better results.
For this deadly vice is thus so widespread because
It has crushed the world, conquering realms one by one.
Indeed, this deadly blow knocks down our homes, it’s said,
And brings about insanity at every turn.
O eternal God, take pity on modern sin,
Make our minds pious and penitent by your law!

If you’re wise, don’t fix on body, wealth, or power;
Yea, while you’re proud you may perchance die suddenly.
There are greater values that humble patience tends,
And it diminishes sins that are caused by vice.
Therefore balance your mind with scales that have been trued;
If praise or blame, keep balance in your heart.

Against licentious behavior in the case of Lust.

O frail sex, from whom issues forth carnal human
Nature, which damages the bulwarks of the soul!
Oh! The carnal nature of humans, which cannot
Be steadfast, so that its ways are purely carnal.
The marriage bonds of spouses that humans hallow,
Alas! flesh reneged on, there did not pay its debt.
There are many indelicacies of raging flesh
At the present, omens of penalties to come.
These are matters that the married should fear.
A philosopher, criticizing carnal sin,
Spoke these words to the folk in illustration:
“Adultery’s punished in one of several ways,
That sinners expiate their caresses;
They will either lose their members, go to prison,
Become diseased, unsavory persons,
Be brought to a halt by unforeseen poverty,
Or die betimes and leave the world condemned.”
Thus lechery lavishes its gifts upon fools,
And turns contrary what it brought before.
What is sweet at first turns out bitter in the end,
Where not just flesh but even spirit falls.
Thus the mind’s eye, blinded by the flesh’s darkness,
Loses the way and falls to its own harm.
When carnal shade obscures the light of human sense
And reason’s mind withdraws into the flesh,
When sensual love holds the spirit in its snare,
Reason is deprived of its common sense.
Human reason, scorned by the flesh, enters service
And scarcely maintains a handmaiden’s place.
There’s no place where habitual lust and reason
Can remain equals, for one must depart.
Desire wages and carnal frenzy favors wars,
And conquered necks go beneath a vile yoke.
But a free reason will torment with death the mind
That serves the flesh, and stands chaste before God.
Lechery has nothing in common with reason;
The one clings to God; the other, a corpse:
Thus it’s clear that whatever fleeting pleasure seeks
In flesh is naught, and, like a shadow, flees.
Many examples show that you must flee from lust:
Take David’s deeds, which the Bible has taught.
At Balaam’s suggestion, lust misled the Hebrews;
Whom the flesh stained, carnal sin overwhelmed.
Young people should know that life slips by on swift foot,
While bent old age, death’s messenger, draws nigh:
Old age’s dreadful winter comes with palsied step
And steals from youth what it cannot renew:
Let the wise therefore review their times in their minds,
And build a conveyance before they fall.
But alas! it’s as if all the plebeian tribe
Stand stained by vice, in service to the flesh.
The age of clay pleads in excuse that it’s brittle,
And eternity’s ruined for a brief life.
Sins of the flesh are so commonly committed
That their constant use is barely shameful;
And so blind love arouses foolish blind lovers,
So no lover sees what should be proper.
Love is unsteady, suddenly collapsed by grief;
In a trice, it does astonishing deeds,
And if you should wish to suppress the flame safely,
Foresee its manner before you thence fall.
Fight against the other sins, as Paul orders you,
And, but human, flee from the war with flesh;
Since love brandishes its wounding dart ere piercing
Hearts, flee cautiously then farther away.
You’ll conquer if you flee, be conquered if you fight;
Be a hare fled, not a lion conquered.
Remember in your heart’s mind the flesh’s last days,
And see in death’s mirror how you will be.
Kisses will be fetid, embraces wormy, pain
Will resolve the toil that had been pleasant.
The undue pleasures of fools are replaced by grief,
And tears full of sorrow dampen laughter.
Deliverance, made vain, ends in corrupt pleasure,
And eternity’s ruined for a brief life.

Believe that nature keeps that statute quite strictly
By which polluted flesh returns to clay.
When fierce death will arise and earth will eat the earth,
Then mankind shall taste what sin will serve it.
Where the flesh is pure, without the blemish of guilt,
Chaste modesty rejoices on all sides.
This paired truth exists only where lust holds no sway,
Where guileless peace abides and gives long life.

Against the world’s deceit in the case of Perjury and Avarice.

There are two known associates of the vices
Who harm the world equally and never leave it:
One perjures fragile faith and the other defends
Avarice’s cause. God hates such accomplices.
First I will describe the perjurer, then later,
The Scriptures, in which law is strewn, will assail greed.
Evil’s origin proceeds from such sins.

Nobody is supposed to take God’s name in vain,
Nor use speech wickedly to swear falsely.
So the Old Law established, but, behold alas!
New error drives men corrupted by bribes.
The greedy see but gifts while they perjure themselves,
For everywhere income governs their sense.
The gentry can’t balance their books without money;
They serve the money their money attracts.
But because the perjurer cheats the divine laws,
The Lord attests he’ll perish by His law.
Thirsty for lucre he runs into snares, but first
His lying tongue gets the rewards of death.
Buying and selling he won’t go empty-handed,
But his rewards will be fire and brimstone.
To sell justice is nothing if not to sell Christ;
Who attend that market may expect loss.
Judas will witness what their grief will be at death;
Bursting asunder, he bore guilt’s burden.
He rued his sin, which he’d committed but the once,
And returned posthaste the money he took.
By that he earned neither pardon nor salvation;
Now he serves as a warning example.
He sold a just man only once; each day we sell
Every evil for monetary gain.
He returned the gold; we hang onto it tightly;
He was rueful, but we are without fear.
And thus avarice, with great ferocity, goads
Our hearts, so that we’re scarcely free of it.
Justice is gone and her comrade, Good Faith, as well;
Fraud and Deceit have now usurped their place.
The folk remain lawless, no one upholds the laws,
And no one maintains, “The laws must be kept.”
In every case, where people seek their own interests,
It’s the fashion to put no trust in trust.
Jacob’s soft voice and Esau’s rough hand at one time
Predicted what the coming day would be.
The deceiver takes the place of another, and
Steals stealthily his associate’s wealth.
A brother seeks to profit from a brother’s loss;
    If one succeeds, the other envies him.
A son can’t wait for his father to become old
    And he can’t see clearly for his blind greed.
Love is now single, consciously without a mate;
    With hatred for you, it loves what is yours.
What now, since the right hand speaks falsely to the left,
    Shall I say? Let one who acts wisely beware.
People live willfully and there’s no more safe path;
    All’s allowed the greedy, busy with gains.
Arms, plunder, guile, ambitious love of possessions
    Follow their path fully to their own will.
The law is silent and coins talk; law sleeps and gold,
    Awake, conquers everywhere with its schemes.
An iron lance does harm, but a gold sword does more;
    It wastes earthly realms; nothing withstands it.
But since death brings everything to a doubtful end,
    There is nothing certain but to love God.
Something’s always lacking in human affairs, and
    Thus this life holds nothing fully fruitful.
The possessions the world gives, it will take away,
    And scornfully empty your marketplace.
Before it has arrived at its end in this world,
    No life can delight in assured rewards.
Alas! why do you heap up wealth, seek possessions,
    When nobody’s able to own themselves?
Therefore, because you’ll lose this world, look to the next,
    Or the time you spend in both is in vain.

Mammon will pass, and greedy desire will perish;
    It turns to ashes, and death drinks your fate.
From this life the pauper, the prince, and the hermit
    Will all thus pass, when dead, to their reward.
Whatever moves you, death removes all of the world,
    And no one pays what is owed until death is paid.
Who grasps this in mind rarely savors joy,
    But the one who acts prudently, with wise counsel,
Very rightly pleases the omnipotent God.

Evils draw nigh the folk at the present moment;
    His eyes weeping, Gower sings of these to readers.
Let whoever hears with open ears commit them
To mind, and, generous, give silver to the poor;
   For the earth is filled with deadly evils.

I write this poem in King Richard’s twentieth year,
With a tearful spirit, having suffered for long.
My voice sounds among people in whom faith’s rule fades,
Whereby the praises owed Christ are heard less and less,
Whom the Virgin bore, conceived by the Holy Ghost.
He’s God and man, in whom salvation is achieved.
The origin of peace proceeds from his kingdom,
Given to the just who, humble, believe in him.
Thus those who want to bring about peace in the world
   Should first make peace, keeping the laws of God.
What Marriage Is

*Quis Sit vel Qualis* occurs at the end of the *Traité*, immediately preceding *Est Amor*, Gower’s poem about his 1398 marriage, and likely derives from the same time. In the Trentham manuscript these nine lines are prefixed to the final eight lines of *Est Amor* to form one poem. The poem’s content urges those who would express physical love to do so within the sacrament of marriage, considered as a spiritual relationship designed to contain the base human instinct for the carnal that wars against proper Christian love. That proper love, expressed within and through the Church, pleases God and leads to salvation. Physical love pleases the flesh but leads to damnation.

About marriage’s sacred order and nature
I’ve written; let that order’s love be spiritual.
By ancient precept, what is to come should be feared;
Yesterday as tomorrow flesh is easily moved.
He who takes pleasure in the flesh will not rejoice,
But his body will weep and his spirit then grieve.
Who keeps himself unstained, unbridled by the flesh,
Blessed, he excels all the classes in the world;
Pleasing to God, he shines on every side.
Love Is

*Est Amor* details the inconsistent, imperfect nature of sensual love, material familiar to Gower’s readers, by listing its contradictory, oxymoronic qualities. The poem bears many similarities to the presentation of the same subject matter in the fifth book of the *Vox Clamantis*, where Gower specifically criticizes gentrymen at much greater length for neglecting constructive marriages to conduct sensuous amours with beautiful young women or pursue profitable relationships with wealthy dowagers. *Est Amor* celebrates marriage as the sacrament that enables something like the safe expression of sexuality and, when appropriate, the perpetuation of humankind. As an institution it was thought to be necessary to the stability of human society. The poem can be dated to sometime soon after 25 January 1398, the day Gower wed Agnes Groundolf in the marriage referred to at the poem’s conclusion. Although Macaulay presents the poem as two short verses (the second beginning at l. 20), Yeager, following Carlson, joins them into one.10

A poem that John Gower wrote concisely, in meter, about the many types of love.

Love is glossed as a warlike peace, merciful trial,
Notorious performance, wayward chance, mighty force,
A noiseless battle, a ruinous victory,
A clinging rule, a school for error, a rash law,
A harmful cure, unpleasant art, vicious virtue, 5
Injurious office, weeping laughter, merry wrath,
A doleful muse, joyous death, sought-after fever,
A poisoned dish, a sweet gall, a lively famine,
A sour wine, drunken drought, raging disposition,
A cold flame, a shining night, a day without light,
Something to be disdained, cliquish and ambitious,
Garrulous, verbose, secret, silent, and zealous, 10
A lovely fiction, an illusionist’s wisdom,

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A ruinous lawsuit, backward wheel, working rest,  
Netlesome rose, foolish hope, and a guileful faith.  

Like a great uproar with various components,  
   Love wanders, fixed in its changing motions.  
Thus let repeatedly heard stories instruct you.  
   That's how we learn about death, love, and life.

Ancient law shows that a good man's sexual path  
Is safer if he's made a marriage covenant.  
As garden roses smell more fragrant than field blooms,  
The order of the wed is chief and end of love.  
It's like the moral rule of those wedded to flesh,  
The worldly sacrament for those who shall be saved.  
Hence I Gower, old in years, hopeful of my due,  
Safe in the spousal order, reach the marriage bed.
O Boundless God

_Ó Deus Immense_ has been dated in 1398/99, either close to the end of Richard’s reign or immediately post-deposition. The subject matter, advice to the king (whether Richard or Henry) is familiar to readers of the _Vox Clamantis_, whose sixth book covers in considerably greater detail the same content concerning the seeking and sifting of counsel.

As the _Vox Clamantis_ likewise tells us, the king who follows the sound counsel of his peers and listens to the voice of the people will make proper decisions and accordingly rule his people well. His reward will be a beloved name and eternity. Kings rule by the authority of God, who sends sound counsel as a celestial gift that helps them keep the laws they swore to uphold at their coronations. In Book 6 of the _Vox Clamantis_ that counsel is presented as the rudder the mariner / king uses to steer the ship of state and the shaped beams that are provided the master builder / king by his skilled craftsmen as he constructs the house that is the nation. The expert advice of a king’s administrative and legislative counsels is in both the _Vox_ and _Ó Deus Immense_ augmented by the voice of the people, which, since it has a connection to God, a king will ignore at his own peril. By the same token, evil counsellors and flatterers must be shunned, for their advice is not founded in a sincere concern for the well-being of either the king or the realm but their own gain. The good king will be generous, of course, but to his loyal citizens, not those who tell him what he wants to hear. In all circumstances, his final concern should be how his actions will appear to heaven’s king, beneath whose rule he rules. In particular he should think at all times about Christ, who should be the model for everything he does. If he pays attention to the well-being of his people and the rule of law, attends to the onus of his position and not simply

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11 For George R. Coffman, the poem was born out of the events of May–October 1399. See his “John Gower, Mentor for Royalty: Richard II,” _PMLA_ 69 (1954): 552–75.
its honor, and guides carefully the carriage of the kingdom, he will rule well and, accordingly, end well.

A poem that John Gower, while he still could, wrote about the most recent governance of princes.

O boundless God, beneath whom govern by the sword
Some certain moral and some certain corrupt kings,
By whose unlike merits now peace, now contention
Makes manifest the public actions of their reigns.
Whenever kings rave, Achaeans suffer for it,
Where wickedness breathes and morals are fugitives.
A king’s praise and honor should be keeping the laws,
To which he swore his oath when fate first summoned him.
I think that good counsel is a celestial gift,
Kisses once bestowed by peace during wars on earth.
Suitable counsel makes a king benevolent;
Malevolence is spread ’neath another banner.
A good king should choose counselors equal to him
In goodness, and all prosperous things will come to him.
Who rules the kingdom by the counsel of the best
Wise men won’t harm it, but will shrink from every sin.
Twisted counsel creates every crime that springs forth
As the fault of the king, and costs him the realm’s love.
“Woe who pillage!” Isaiah cries to the greedy;
This is said in clear words to you who would govern.
A king who thinks that gold is a greater treasure
Than the people’s love falls suddenly from their hearts.
Where the people’s tongue does not dare to sound its words,
It’s likely its mind will speak darkly in mutters.
The folk soon whisper about scandals on manors,
Whence evil thrives and the wise are often alarmed.
You have to believe that this muttering should be feared;
If it’s widespread, then above all protect yourself.
The tongue cannot speak, nor can the mind contemplate,
How devious a guileful friend fraudulently acts.
The world will witness that such ones infect the realm
Like another plague with many a secret crime.
A fawning flatterer and greedy counselor,
Although you don’t want that, makes many mutiny.
Many times a disease is cured by bitter herbs;
Often a stern word helps and a gentle one harms.
They who paint a lie with fraud and rewrite the truth
Are those who sometimes do harm with their flattering speech.
The king who employs such brings scandal on himself,
And degrades a name that’s rarely noble again.
What grows in the morning is worthless by evening,
When guileful spoken words are taken as the truth.
By such counsel especially is the kingdom
Roiled everywhere, whereby the king’s honor is harmed.
Thus now just as yesterday this sort of thing’s seen,
Whence the people who are injured complain the more.
If forewarned, the experienced are not then deceived;
Since they see beforehand, they flee what’s clearly vain.
When a bird is snared, others beware; just so mild
And pious kings always fear what’s going to come.
A foolish king thinks nobody is criminal,
Until the situation at his gate is grave;
But he who wants to be informed hastens to go
Listen to the folk’s voice and act accordingly.
All things to the king’s error or to his honor
Are proclaimed by the clamor from the people’s mouth.
The king who is moral will not be ambitious,
And beneath him the realm’s statutes will remain safe.
No miser ever had an illustrious name;
An open hand earns by praise its name and power.
The people’s voice gives you your royal name; how so
It be, or good or bad, God takes it for your own.
O king, if you’d be safe, if you would know yourself,
You would wisely have ears for the voice of the folk.
Your praise or your blame, as you have heard, arises
From the people, who bear words both bitter and sweet.
Reputation grows swiftly, but fades suddenly;
Fortune’s at least constant since it won’t stay stable.
Human affairs can’t know or stabilize Fortune
At its outset, to make some plan beyond that point.
But an end that’s experienced can be called certain;
Such are its acts, since the outcome approves the facts.
The king who seeks to be praised and blessed in the end
Should perform good deeds, that his crown be remembered.
Let his royal good deeds proceed and crimes recede,
That a king live ever with the supernal king.
Without God, vain pomp will be with you every day;
Remember that you’ll die without the praise of God.
The king who puts the world first and leaves Christ second
Will be the last in line and lack praise in the end.
For whatever his name, his last chronicle tells
When a king’s life has been laid to rest without praise.
And so I briefly make an end to my plain song:
Where kings reign with order, they make fruitful their names.
Where the head is infirm, the members are not firm,
Nor will the folk be firm where virtue does not rule.
The king who would seize the certain reward of praise,
Let him put Christ, who crowns kings with praise, at the fore.
Who presumes about himself will assume too much;
Without praise at the end, your fame is upside down.
This lesson pertains to all living governors.
He who displeases the people does not please God;
Grace will succeed on its merits when sin recedes.
The king who does not believe this injures his realm.

Not by the chance of fate, but judgment’s weight,
Comes the remedy for royal evil.
The folk as your flock, life and death, the rule of law
Are what you gather beneath royal hands.
Though a favoring throne provides much for a time,
Honor is onus if all ends not well.
Let a king thus watch how he goes with his carriage,
Careful lest its turning wheel leave the road.
May these things I’ve written manifest heaven’s God,
For nothing can be hidden from his law.
Because Each One (Colophon B)

*Quia Unusquisque* is a prose account of Gower’s major productions that appears in three versions in manuscripts of the *Confessio Amantis*. The earliest version, the A-Text, absolves Richard of responsibility for the Uprising of 1381. The middle version is found in the second recension of the *Confessio*. The third version, which we present here, designated the B-Text, blames Richard for his own downfall. According to its content, it must be dated after Richard’s deposition and Henry’s usurpation in 1399.

**B-Text**

Because each one is obligated to share with others what one has received from God, John Gower, wishing to unburden to a certain extent his account of his stewardship of what God openly granted him, issued while he lived three books in particular for the attention and instruction of others.

The first book, issued in the French language, divided into ten parts and treating the virtues and vices, and also the different degrees of this world, attempts to teach the way on the straight path by which the transgressed sinner ought to return to the knowledge of his Creator. And the title of this *libellus* is named *Speculum Meditantis*.

The second book, composed metrically in the Latin language, deals with the various misfortunes occurring in England in the time of King Richard II, when not only the nobles and commons of the realm endured tribulations, but also the most cruel king himself, falling from on high because of his own faults, finally was cast into the pit that he had made. And the name of this volume is titled *Vox Clamantis*.

The third book, executed in the English language out of reverence for his most bold lord, Lord Henry of Lancaster, then Earl of Derby, describes the ages of the realms upon this earth, according to the prophecy of Daniel, from the changing time of King Nebuchadnezzar until now.

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12 The written indictment of a case in canon law as well as a “little book.”
13 The corresponding passage in the A-Text reads: “The second book, written in Latin hexameter and pentameter verses, deals with that extraordinary event that happened in England during King Richard’s time, in the fourth year of his reign, when the peasant villeins rashly revolted against the nobles and freemen of the realm. Nevertheless, pronouncing the said lord king’s virtuousness not at fault because of his minor age, it declares others guilty, by whom and not by Fortune such outrages take place among men. The name of this book, which is structured in seven sections, is called *Vox Clamantis*.” For a discussion of the colophon and its variants, see Wickert, *Studies*, 3–7.
He also touches upon those matters that King Alexander was taught, according to Aristotle, not only by his own discipline but also elsewhere. However, the principal matter of this work has its foundation upon the love and foolish passions of lovers. The appropriate name *Confessio Amantis* was specifically assigned to it.
Behold the Drawn Bow

_Ecce Patet Tensus_ is comprised largely of rearranged lines (elegiacs) from the _Vox Clamantis_ and likely belongs to the earliest phase of the last poems, predating the more elaborate rhyming efforts of the second and third phases Carlson postulates. Its subject matter is the dangers of sensual love, which occupies the poet throughout his life and is always presented negatively unless it is experienced within the confines of sacramental marriage. If the poem is a sort of companion piece to _Est Amor_, that would date it in 1398. However, it shares not only subject matter with Book 5 of the _Vox Clamantis_, written circa 1380, but a number of lines as well, perhaps suggesting it can be dated sometime in the mid-1390s when Gower was revising sections of the _Vox_. The famous depiction of Gower as an archer shooting the arrows of righteousness at the world and its sinners is basically the other side of the picture presented here, in which the arrows of sensuality are the means whereby a goodly bit of the world’s sin is brought to fulfillment.

Behold! blind Cupid’s drawn bow can plainly be seen,  
   From which the arrow, flown, is love’s passion.  
Blind Love conquers all, but goes astray everywhere,  
   Unable to find himself the straight way.  
Thus he leads the blind lovers who are his servants,  
   So no lover sees what should be proper.  
Thus the mind’s eye, blinded by the flesh’s darkness,  
   Has grown dim, and reason, irrational.  
Thus Love, whom blind Pleasure suckles, lives by Will,  
   And serves him everything at his pleasure;  
All the world rests in the shadow beneath Love’s wings,  
   And each one everywhere follows his rules.  
When he’s been crowned, he makes the poor and powerful  
   Equal to each other by the same law.  
Thus Love tames all, everything Nature has brought forth,  
   And yet himself remains untamed by all.  
He imprisons and sets free, binds and loosens bonds,  
   Wounds every creature but receives no wound.  
No one lives upon earth who conquers in Love’s wars,
Nor has anyone a peace pact with him.
Not Sampson’s strength nor David’s sword or Solomon’s
Wisdom contains anything of merit.

O our nature, which nobody can elevate,
Which does not excuse the evil it does!
O our nature, which is fashioned in such a way
That it can’t avoid what it ought not do!
O our nature, made of intertwined opposites,
Both of which it’s not allowed to follow!
O our nature, which forever has within it
The war of body and soul for their rights!
Thus Cupid consumes the lovers’ hearts with his fire,
And as if by war holds them his subjects.
Who wishes therefore to quench the flame of his flesh,
Let beware the bow from which arrows fly.
No one’s able to avoid this inborn disease,
Unless it be that grace alone cure him.
Heaven’s King

*Rex Celi Deus* is one of several verses addressed to King Henry IV (the so-called “laureate” poems) and can accordingly be assigned to the period after that king’s election by parliament (30 September 1399). Much of the content, however, has been recycled from Book 6 of the *Vox Clamantis*, where it is used in an open letter to instruct the young Richard when, early in his reign, he still enjoyed the poet’s favor. That letter, moreover, may have already existed in an independent form (dubbed the *Epistola ad regem*) when it was repurposed as the climax of Book 6, there presented, as direct address to a young king in need of instruction, following a lengthy account of the state of his realm that comprised the preceding three books of the *Vox.*

It could as well have a connection with the legal petitions to the Crown that had become a standard element in common law procedure. Perhaps, too, we should consider that the recycled material would have an ironic undertone that would give the new king pause to consider recent history and derive a lesson about his own future behavior from it. At the very least it would suggest the priority of the message over whatever monarch is supposedly its embodiment.

By the time the material shows up in *Rex Celi Deus*, it not only has epistolary and petitionary characteristics but also affinities to hymnal tradition, in particular a popular hymn titled *Celi Deus Sanctissime*. Beginning with a lengthy and intricate apostrophe to God, Gower

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urges the new king to see himself as the agent of a merciful Lord who has sent him to the relief of a long-suffering people. Since he has been sent like Christ, Christ should be his model so that his valor and knighthood will be employed to the people’s profit and well-being. In the same spirit, the new king should bring with him able counselors and avoid the flatterers who had surrounded and compromised the former king. Governing in the manner recommended will assure the king heaven’s realms when he has fulfilled his task on earth.

Here follows a song in which is glorified our magnificent King Henry, distinguished before God and men with every blessing.

Heaven’s King, Lord and God, who alone created
   The ages, alone rules all creation,
Brought forth from himself the causes of things, granted
   In himself the one beginning of things,
Who bestowed a stable motion upon the earth,
   Fixed for eternity in its movement,
And who, mighty of word, brought forth the creation,
   And who bound it by the law of his mind,
He, the head of kings, by whom kings are set aright,
   I beg, gracious king, rule you and your realm.
Supervening grace has freely sent you to us;
   Ere that was no salvation without stain.
Your advent by his will thus introduced new joys
   Where before there had been mournful weeping.
Your chivalry raised us trembling up from the depths,
   Whom before every weighty evil pressed.
By your valor, where death was lurking in shadow,
   Bright life rose again and governs the realm.
Thus your lot healed and fixed, by mediating God,
   Our renewed lot, which before was wretched.
O pious king, through you we praise Christ and, renewed,
   The land worships him who gave us to you.
Blessed be that day when you sought the realm for yourself,
   And blessed be God, who gave the realm to you!
May he confer future realms who brought you the first,
   Where, great, you will prosper in great honor.

May thus your offspring multiply through the ages,
   That your pious family fill all the land.
Whatever has been good on earth, may he on high
   Grant that you reign in honor in our lands.
May every evil cease, lest it do harm, and may
   God give to you every good in the world.
Let no wicked counsel, O pious king, touch you,
   In which God knows that there is hidden guile.
Away with avarice, lest it touch royal hearts;
   A traitor can’t be allowed in your land.
Thus may your good fortune go forth eternally,
   So that all ages will renew your praise.
As the heralds of Augustus once did in Rome,
   Let happy England celebrate your deeds.
May you, O bravest king, be granted for our age
   The honored scepter ever in your hand.
Stand thus magnanimous, that where you rule your realm
   No hostile hand may terrify these parts.
May Christ enhance your empire and enhance your years,
   And protect our gates with your enhanced crown.
May your end be peace, may you rule in a ruled world,
   May all things lesser be on your shoulders.
Thus honor and virtue, praise, glory, peace and power
   Let make magnificent your realm and you.

I’ve made my vows to you, O king, with my heart’s love,
   And it is my desire only to serve.
Therefore on bended knee, to your honor and praise
   I, a poor man, bear words in place of gifts.
But it is, O merciful king, my word’s desire,
   That heaven’s realm be yours when this realm ends.
O Remember

O Recolende, an epistle as well as a laureate verse, the second of the poems that have come to be so titled, was perhaps written upon the occasion of Henry’s coronation, which occurred October 13, 1399. It advises the king along the conventional lines the poet followed in counselling Richard in Book 6 of the Vox Clamantis. That Richard has become Pharaoh, from whom the English have to be saved by Moses / Henry, shows the extent to which the poet has turned his back on the king he set out to guide in 1377. The poem advises the new king to keep the well-being of the people foremost in his thoughts, leading them to peace by reason and mercy but holding them to the law. His personal life should be above reproach, his demeanor, peaceful, and his companions, individuals in his own likeness. His service to God and the people will be marked by the piety that will protect him from danger in the exercise of his duties. His personal life will be marked by avoidance of the flesh and adherence to the spirit, whereby God will keep him from harm.

A brief letter, urging that royal moral virtues be kept in mind and applied to sound government.

O good, pious King Henry, patron, remember
To incline to good those whom you’ve snatched from Pharaoh.
Repair the harm with which this our land has struggled,
So that the people of the realm live by reason.
Arrange peace, moderate the powers of the crown,
Impose the reins of the law without condition,
Admonish that the law be strictly kept.

Confirmed a king, although everywhere exalted,
Live ne’ertheless worthily, spotless under Christ.
Beneath your law you govern the prelate and earl,
The baron, manor, senate, knight and armiger.
Guide the estates so that you remain pacific;
Don’t have the jealous, proud, and greedy for comrades;
Thus pure, you will be honored on all sides.
O pious king, Gower writes you as lovers will.  
Where mercy shall go, there no grace will pass away.  
Who marks himself well will undergo no evils,  
But pious go and piously return to God.  
Thus he who survives and arrives at mercy’s work,  
God will remark so that the foe cannot kill him.

That’s how he’ll end who drinks pious pledges.  
The more that overall royal honor is yours,  
The more you should have a unique moral virtue.  
But let the rule of flesh be to you in the world  
As the spiritual rule of Christ is in your mind.  
If so you have been, your enduring chronicle  
Will then be like it and perfect in its content.

May the Immortal King keep you from harm!

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17 Lines 17–21 differ in SCG (over erasure) and in HH2:  
While it drinks vows of mercy, your fame cannot thirst,  
But when it goes forth full, it returns full of praise.  
It will not pass over to where the tyrant went;  
When it claims too much for itself, it acquires less;  
As it seeks its deserts, Fortune gets its fate.
H., Eagle’s Fledgling

*H. Aquile Pullus*, the third of the laureate verses, was most likely written to mark the elevation of Henry’s son Henry (Shakespeare’s Prince Hal) to Prince of Wales (15 October 1399) and Duke of Aquitaine (23 October 1399). It uses one of Gower’s favorite agricultural metaphors, the grafting of a scion onto an established stock. The oil used by the archbishop in anointing the young prince / duke, which was a sacred relic associated with Thomas Becket, becomes the wax used by the orchardist to seal his graft. Richard has been lopped from the trunk of the English royal tree, to be replaced by a scion from the same stock. The image is both simple and complex and reminds us that Gower was, after all, a country squire.

Young Henry is destined to become the king that Gower longed for all his life, a ruler whose claim upon the throne is not tainted by usurpation and whose triumph in France in 1415 will bring England victory and peace, however illusory it turns out to be.

H., eagle’s fledgling, than whom no one’s more welcome, 
Has shattered foes and forced despotic necks to bow.  
He’s ta’en the eagle’s oil, which warrants him the realm; 
Joined by the oil, a new scion renews old stock.18

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18 A similar image is applied to Henry IV’s coronation in the *Cronica Tripertita* 3.358–9: 
Hoc facto leta stupet Anglia laude replete,  
Cordeque letatur, quia stirps de stirpe leuatur. 
Then England marvels, full of praise, and rejoices 
In its heart that the scion has come from the stock.
The Chosen of Christ

Electus Cristi is a brief Latin poem prefixed to In Praise of Peace, Gower’s long English poem written soon after Henry came to the throne, and accordingly belongs to the period immediately following Henry’s accession in 1399. It positions Henry not only as the familiar figure chosen by Christ to rule his realm, but also as the righteous restorer of their rights and properties to all those who, like himself, were unlawfully dispossessed. Such an auspicious beginning can only be an augury of the happy future that awaits a land that has experienced sorrow for so long under Richard.

Merciful King Henry, you’re the chosen of Christ,
You who were welcomed when you sought your own kingdom,
Overcame evils, restored their goods to the good,
And imparted new joys to a sorrowful folk.
It is my hope that yet, amply renewed by you,
Our fate will proceed, blessed by ancient righteousness,
   For welcome grace is freely given you.
Whate’er A Man Writes (At the End)

Quicquid Homo Scribat (In Fine), which exists in three versions (although R. F. Yeager suggests they could as well be three poems), would seem to mark a point close to the end of the slow progress of the blindness that Gower laments for so long, although it is not the last poem he will write. Now, however, he clearly asserts a failure of vision that has rendered him incapable of continuing on as he has in the past. He is at the end of his years and his strength, ready to pass the torch to other, presumably younger writers. The version we present first dates the failure of Gower’s vision to the first year of Henry’s reign, 13 October 1399 (the coronation) to 12 October 1400. The poet takes his farewell of his craft, laying down his pen and now, at the end of his career, requests the reward for all his efforts on behalf of righteousness and morality: entrance into the blessed realms of heaven.

Trentham Version

It was in the first year of Henry the Fourth’s reign,
When the vision needed to act failed me.
Everything has its time; Nature supplies the end,
Which no one can escape by one’s own strength.
Although my will has survived, no more strength remains,
That I’d be able to write any more.
When I could, I wrote, but now, because bent old age
Twisted my sense, I leave writing to schools.
Let those who come after me write more prudently,
For from now on my hand and pen are still.
Nonetheless, this I ask at the end of my words:
God grant his blessed future realms. Amen.

---

Yeager, Minor Poems, 79.
Cotton, Harleian, Glasgow Version

The version we present second locates itself in the opening line as a product of the second year of Henry’s reign, which was 13 October 1400 to 12 October 1401. It is sometimes referred to as *In Fine* because of the opening words of its introductory Latin prose statement, a feature shared by the third version as well.

Note here at the end how I, the concerned author, although unworthy, writing for a long time among others, have written briefly in summary form various poems concerning various events, from the beginning of that chronicle that is called *Vox Clamantis* together with the following chronicle that is tripartite, from the time of King Richard the Second up to his deposition as well as from the coronation of the most illustrious Lord King Henry the Fourth up to the second year of his reign, chiefly concerning those things that happened in England not long ago, which need to be read. And now, because I am unable to write sensibly any more about chronicles, burdened by the weight of old age as well as a host of other infirmities, as is obvious, I intend consequently to announce my requisite retirement.

It was in the second year of our King Henry
When I ceased to write, because I was blind.
Although my will still serves, my strength can do nothing;
I don’t have the drive to write something more.
Eager when I was able to write, I wrote much;
One part dealt with the world, one part with God.
But I’ve left to the world to write its vanities,
And writing a last poem I go to die.
Let he who comes after me write more prudently,
For from now on my hand and pen are still.
Thus since I can’t do something useful with my hands,
I will bear the onus of work with prayer.
Therefore I, living but blind, entreat with my tears
That, God, you’d grant those blessed future realms,
And allow me your holy light. Amen.
All Soul’s Version

The final version, which begins with the words by which the poem is now generally titled, is contained in a manuscript presented to Archbishop Arundel in 1402, the only clue to its dating. It differs from the others in noting that the poet’s mind is still actively composing, although his compositions now are prayers that ask God, his ultimate patron, for his final reward.

Here at the end it should be noted how, among those writing about events that happened in England in those times, I wrote various poems about various occurrences, as is well known, from that chronicle that is called *Vox Clamantis* to the end of that chronicle that is tripartite, which it is needful to read. But now, because I am unable to write much more, I shall give more fully the reason for my retirement in the following verses.

Whate’er a man writes, Nature furnishes the end,
That like a shadow flees, nor, fled, returns;
She’s put an end to me, so that I cannot write
Anything further because I am blind.
My strength has departed, although my will remains;
Though my will would write more, strength denies me.
Eager when I was able, I wrote many songs;
One part dealt with the world and one part, God.
But I’ve left to the world to write its vanities,
And write the words of God in my mind’s song.
Though my outside is incapable of writing,
My mind writes within and adorns my work.
Because henceforth I’ll write nothing by my hand’s strength,
I write with my prayers what my hand cannot.
A blind man, I pray for this in my present days,
That, God, you’ll grant those blessed future realms,
And allow me your holy light. Amen.
The Epistle to Arundel

The Epistola ad Arundel is contained in the same manuscript (All Souls = S) as the third version of Quicquid Homo Scribat and 1402 is accordingly the only date connected to it in any way, although the poet’s clear reference to his blindness affirms such a late date. It was once thought that the Epistle was intended to dedicate a presentation copy of the Vox Clamantis to the archbishop, but the poem’s placement in the manuscript may have been the consequence of a later rebinding and it’s just as likely that some other poem, perhaps the Carmen super Multiplici Viciorum Pestilencia, was the intended gift.\(^\text{20}\) The poem’s subject matter is Gower’s familiar search for a guiding light, but unlike his earlier survey of English society in De Lucis Scrutinio, in which he finds no lamp, here the sought-for illumination is found in the person of Archbishop Arundel, who is asked to be Gower’s personal light as well as a beacon of light and hope for all England. The archbishop, brother of Earl Arundel of Appellate Lord fame, had been cast from the see of Canterbury by Richard and gone into exile on the continent, to return in triumph with Bolingbroke when Gaunt’s heir came to claim the lands Richard had seized from him while he was in exile. Arundel’s reward for his fealty to the future Henry IV was return to ecclesiastical power as Archbishop of Canterbury once again. Gower had apparently been an admirer of his for many years, no doubt in part because of a shared distaste for the Lollards, the persecution of whom will be Arundel’s enduring legacy. Gower’s admiration for Arundel puts a seal of sorts on his own position in the English intellectual world.

The poem presents one of Gower’s most obscure word plays when he inserts the word *tus* (frankincense) into the midst of the name T(h)omas to create the phrase *totus mas* (completely

masculine), giving the sense that the archbishop, infused with divine substance, is the perfect prelate.

With a devout heart, John Gower, old and blind, has sent the following epistle to his esteemed Lord and Most Reverend Father in Christ, Lord Thomas of Arundel, Archbishop of Canterbury, Primate of All England and Legate of the Apostolic See. Whose office for the governance of His Church may our Lord Jesus Christ guide and blissfully preserve, the son of the glorious Virgin who with God the Father and the Holy Ghost lives and reigns, God forever and ever. Amen.

Thomas, Thomas’s heir, I give you my humble self
And write the book that follows, a present to you.
Be heedful of this work that I present to you
And, as you contemplate it, let it stir your mind.
The divided curia seen these days in Rome
Turns joy into sorrow because it is corrupt.
And because Christ’s law mourns in this sorrowful time,
I send you this book, that should be read as a plaint.
But grant, you who bear the light of divine healing,
A cure for those sorrowing, that it bring them joy.
Since the light has ceased and the Faith darkens elsewhere,
Shine your light, you our Phoebus, upon our affairs,
And so that you shine bright and glow with your power,
I offer for your light this work that I’ve written.
I think it won’t be in vain, if you look clearly,
With a judicious spirit, in such a mirror.
I’m almost blind, but though I can’t see what goes on,
I see you in my mind and hold you in my heart.
Although crooked old age has twisted my worn out
Body, it allows my mind to remain zealous,
And thus zealous in Christ I persist in this work,
In which I’ll write for you the world’s manifest deeds.
Hence, father, I pray, while I work on my writings,
You put at ease the spirit of a zealous mind.
I have ever loved you as a father, whereby
I’ve hoped your special grace would be mine in the end.
Because my sight has now been reft from my body,
Let your light shine and guide the footsteps of my soul.
Let my wretched body, old and miserable,
Helped by you, its protector, not be confounded.
And so, my guardian in life and death alike,
Take me by your suffrage, blinded, along with you.
Your honorable light, that shines from noble stock,
Must needs not lie hidden beneath the world’s ashes.

Let Arundel shine with a new light, like the sun,
Which brought you forth and which first nursed you at its breast.
You’re named at birth Tomas, since you are *totus mas*;
Whence made whole by God you are kept from every stain,
And thus a prelate, now sanctified by Christ’s law,
You keep the law by which you keep yourself from stain.
Your light in our day is bright, unspotted by sin,
And shines clearly since no dishonor obscures it.
Let England rejoice that it merits such a lamp,
Where those who would live well follow your example.
Through you all love will prosper and anger withdraw,
And under your care all our days are prosperous.
And since your light thus increases and fills the earth,
May God grant such a light be yours eternally.
This is what Gower asks, who is and will be yours.
Prelate to the King’s Sheepfold

*Presul Ouile Regis*, perhaps addressed to Archbishop Arundel, can be dated to 1402, the year in which the comet mentioned in a marginal note to the poem appeared in England. The comet, the poet suggests, marks the appearance of rebellion against Henry, which has expressed itself as a disease among the flock. The traitors referred to are the supporters of the deposed and disposed of Richard, whose challenge to Henry’s right to the throne has been persistent in various manifestations since the usurpation. It is unlikely that Gower has in mind the coalition of northern and western March Lords who had backed Henry’s bid against Richard. They are in the process of articulating their disagreements with the new king but not yet sufficiently disenchanted by Henry’s high-handed treatment of them once he had usurped the throne. Their rebellion, however, which would be much more serious and consequential, is not far off.

The poem is built around the contrasting darkness of the disease that has infected the flock and the light that is pastoral care. We take the stains that have appeared in the sheep to be blackleg, a common infection of sheep and goats that results in dark blotches appearing on the upper forelegs and rear haunches. The infection is the legacy of Richard, whose adherents throng the high road, not unlike the rebels of 1381.

**A note about the appearances of a comet in England.**

Prelate to the king’s sheepfold, where the blackleg is,
The pestilence darkens the while you hide your light.
Guard your flock, for an ominous star has appeared,
’Neath which a tribe of traitors throngs the king’s highway.
Will in the place of law now leads a greedy world;
Where’er you send, there’s naught but bitterness of heart.
It should be clear there’s little sweet these days.

https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/accessus/vol8/iss1/2
He Who Made the Ages

*Unanimes Esse Qui Secula* contains no clue about a likely date. Its location in the manuscripts suggests it is post-1402. Its subject matter is peace, the issue of love, which can be taken in several ways. *Caritas*, proper Christian love, the antidote to *cupiditas*, love of the world, is a standard feature of Christian teaching. Love was as well a component of the customary law yet in effect in some areas, and love days, when communities attempted to resolve local disputes by submitting them to arbitration designed to lead to reconciliation, were yet a feature of rural society in the late fourteenth century. Most importantly, however, love is a figure for Christ, whose lordship is necessary to the foundation of peace.

Gower’s insistence on the past as the guide to the present is a standard theme throughout his poetry and a hermeneutical thread leading throughout the *Vox Clamantis*, which insists that everything that was and is should be viewed as a guiding sign sent from God.

He who made the ages commands us expressly
To be of one mind, because love should be supreme.
Law’s granted by right, peace rejoices, the folk joy,
The kingdom is strengthened when true love is the lord.
As winter the flower, division batters love,
Nourishes error like the plague, and causes grief.
What happened yesterday tells us to fear danger,
So that the truly wise learn to heal the ages.
May God’s son himself, in whom hope of peace abides,
Guide a matter’s actions by faith’s merits.

Let us love one another.
The Husbandman in the Church

_Cultor in Ecclesia_ contains no clues to guide its dating. By its position in the manuscripts it is likewise considered late, perhaps sometime between 1402 and Gower’s death in 1408. Its subject matter is the two most common agrarian figures that represent the good priest: the farmer who sows the seed of God’s word and the shepherd who is the keeper of God’s sheep. The good farmer plants morality and harvests salvation. The good shepherd will acquire his flock without the intercession of Simon, that is to say, he will not gain access to the priesthood by the intercession of a bishop, an _episcopus donator_, who will accept bribes in return for the exercise of his powers of appointment. Since the simoniac has acquired his post as a money-making business venture, he has no proper concern for the well-being of his sheep, who will be lost in the wastelands of spiritual dryness. Only the true shepherd brings his flock home to Christ’s pasture.

The husbandman in the Church who, lacking wisdom,
Sows vanity will harvest foolishness.
But those husbandmen who sow morality’s seeds
At Christ’s Mass profit many things thereby.
Therefore, the good planter who seeks heaven’s profits,
Whence he would profit, should sow sacred seeds.

He who would be a shepherd in Christ’s just order,
Should not let Simon be his go-between with Christ.
Let the shepherd seek a pure pasture without sin,
For it’s indeed vile if Simon tends the sheepfold.
Through the wasteland, where no sure way reveals itself,
Simon leads sheep that he rarely returns to Christ.
Scripture Says

*Dicunt Scriture* is thought to be one of the last poems Gower wrote before his death in 1408 and is likely the byproduct of his own will making. The content of the poem is almsgiving as preparation for death. The poet considers the issue from a legal perspective. If you leave instructions in your will for the distribution of alms to the poor on your behalf, in the hope that your charitable gesture will assist your situation at the Last Judgment, you may be deceived by executors who devise a way to channel those funds to their own use. Wise people will accordingly exercise their charitable obligations while yet alive and give their money into their own hands for distribution to the poor. The poem’s content and its lawyerly frame of mind are entirely consistent with the kinds of thoughts one would expect of Gower in his last days.

**A note against the executors of the dead.**

Scripture says to think about the last things of life;
Each one will pass, a pauper, from this world.
Fortune bestows various stations, but Nature
Ends all and seizes everything at death.
After your death few people, now considered friends,
Remember your soul, which thus you should do.
Give, while you have time, let your heir be your own hand;
No one can take away what you yourself give God.
Pray for the Soul (A Squire’s Shield)

*Orate pro Anima (Armigeri Scutum)*, the poet’s epitaph for his tomb, is dated 1408, the year of his death. Two versions of the prose text (*Orate pro Anima*) survive. The prose text and the accompanying verse (*Armigeri Scutum*) were clearly intended for inscription on his tomb but can no longer be read.

Pray for the soul of John Gower. For whoever has prayed devoutly for the soul of the said John shall have each and every time one thousand five hundred days of indulgence duly granted by the Church mercifully in the Lord.

To those praying for the soul of John Gower, one thousand five hundred days of indulgence are granted mercifully in the Lord.

His esquire’s shield henceforth provides no protection;  
Now clay, he’s paid death its universal tribute.  
May he rejoice that his spirit, released, is free,  
Without stain, where the kingdom of the virtues stands.
Appendix A

The following two poems are not by Gower but apparently by a close acquaintance. Macaulay speculates that he is Ralph Strode, an Oxford theologian mentioned by Chaucer in the same breath with Gower. The poems pertain to exchanges of manuscripts containing the two men’s respective writings and occur in manuscripts of Gower’s works. We include them for the light they shed upon Gower’s literary circle and their contemporary sense of the poet’s place in literary history, which, while expressed within topical conventions, nevertheless gives some indication of Gower’s standing in his own day.

**Whom the Seas Surround**

*Quam Cinxere Freta* occurs at the end of the *Confessio Amantis*, where it immediately precedes the Colophon. The suggestion that Gower was celebrated for his “joyous” songs, or even that he had a reputation as a “champion of song,” may startle the modern reader, who has been conditioned by literary historians to see only the “moral” Gower.

*A letter sent by a certain philosopher to John Gower upon the completion of these little trifles of his own.*

England, whom the seas surround, Gower, proclaims your Joyous songs throughout all her shires with fulsome praise. Whether champion of song or a satiric poet, Be your praise fulfilled so your glory’s without bound.
The Measures of Aeneid, Eclogues, and Georgics

_Eneidos Bucolis_ appears in a number of Gower manuscripts. Macaulay includes it among the minor works but attributes it in his notes to Ralph Strode. It does not have the feel of Gower’s verse. The comparison of Gower to Virgil may strike the modern reader as sheer hyperbole, but it likely would have resonated with a contemporary reader eager to entertain a comparison of England with Rome from a literary perspective.

A poem that a certain philosopher wrote in the following manner in memory of John Gower about the accomplishment of his three books, and sent to him with thanks.

The measures of _Aeneid, Eclogues, and Georgics_
Bestowed on Virgil wreaths of praise in schools.
For these three books he has honor’s place ‘mongst poets,
And Rome received them with thunderous praise.
So too, Gower, England, where you’ve sown your writings,
Was granted your three moral indictments.
That one wrote his measures in Latin discourses
Only, that Italian letters know him,
But it’s well known that you wrote your three poems in three
Tongues, that their learning be borne to more men.
First French and Latin, but then your native English
Language has perfected work sprung from you.
That one astounded Roman ears with vanities,
And a pagan muse frolicked in his works,
But your compositions shine to reborn Christians,
For which you’ll have glory in heaven’s heights.
Appendix B

The language and style of Gower’s elegiac short poems correspond with his practice in the
*Vox Clamantis*. However, although grammar, vocabulary, and usage do not change in the
rhyming poems, the style, the poetic practice, is quite different. While Gower does resort to
rhyme occasionally and incidentally in the *Vox Clamantis*, it becomes a major concern, perhaps
even the major concern, in the poems he writes later in his career. The poet’s increased emphasis
on technical issues is seen clearly in such a poem as *O Recolende*.

This 28-line poem comprises four stanzas of seven lines each. The words before the caesura
and the words ending the line all rhyme. Each stanza is comprised of six dactylic hexameter lines
and one dactylic pentameter line at the end. Each stanza has a different rhyme, as the first two
lines of each show:

O recolende, bone, || pie rex, Henrice patrone,
Ad bona dispone || quos eripis a Pharaone

Rex confirmatus, || licet vnndique magnificatus,
Sub Cristo gratus || viuas tamen inmaculactus

Hec, vt amans quibit, || Gower, pie Rex, tibi scribit:
Quo pietas ibit, || ibi gracia nulla peribit

Quanto regalis || honor est tibi plus generalis
Tanto moralis || virtus tibi sit specialis.

Gower employs, moreover, feminine rhyme, that is, the rhymes are disyllabic with the primary
stress on the first, i.e. the line’s penultimate syllable: -one, -atus -abit, -alis. The leonine
pentameter at the end of each stanza has the metrical pattern — u u | — u u | — || — u u | — u u | x,
in which the first two dactyls may become spondees and the final syllable, noted x, is anceps, i.e.
either long or short indifferently:
Firmaque sermone || iura tenere mone.

Sic eris ornatus, || purus ad omne latus.

Et sic finibit || qui pia vota bibit.

Rex inmortalis || te regat absque malis!

By way of comparison, the first twelve lines of the *Carmen super Multiplici Viciorum Pestilencia* rhyme the same throughout, presenting twenty-four words ending in *-atur*, and the first fifteen lines of *Est Amor* rhyme thirty words ending in *-osa*. *O Recolende* is a much more complex rhyming poem, a veritable tour de force.

One result of the rhymes is the strongly felt division of each line into two parts. Of course, every line of Latin hexameter verse should have a break somewhere, a caesura, which occurs at certain specific locations, most often after the first syllable of the third foot. An example from Virgil:


A similar example from Gower:

In Colchos thauri, || quos vicit dextra Iasonis, (*Vox* 1.263).

Occasionally, there are two strong caesurae in a line. Again Virgil:

Quid faciat || laetas segetes || quo sidere terram… (*Georgics* 1.1).

Gower:

Hec est gens || ratione carens || ut bestia, namque… (*Vox* 5.651).

Leonine verses are all of the first type, with one strong caesura in the third foot. Again taking *O Recolende* as illustrative:
O recolende, bone, || pie rex, Henrice, patrone,
Ad bona dispone || quos eripis a Pharaone:
Noxia depone, || quibus est humus hec in agone,
Regni persone || quo viuant sub racione.
Pacem compone, || vires moderare corone,
Legibus impone || frenum sine condicione,
Firmaque sermo || iura tenere mone. [A pentameter line.]

The rhyming words come right before the caesura and at the end of the line. Other rhyme
schemes occur, as in the *Carmen super Multiplici Viciorum Pestilencia* 86–93, 217–224, but are
a distinct minority. For example:

Tempore Ricardi, || super hiis que fata tulerunt, AB
Seismata lollardi || de novitate serunt: AB
Obstet principiis || tribulos purgareque vadat CD
Cultor in ecclesiis, || ne rosa forte cadat. CD

Gower’s leonine verses also tend to have a greater number of spondaic feet than is usual
in Latin verse, especially before the caesura, as seen in the first six lines of *De Lucis Scrutinio*:21

Heů, quiā pēr crēbrās || hūmūs ēst vīciātā tēnēbrās, [Heu is a long diphthong.]
Vīx ītēr hūmānūm || lōcūs ūllūs hābēt sībī plānūm.
Sī Rōmām pērgās, || ūt iēbī tūā lūmīnā tērgās,
Lūmīnā mīrā cāpē, || quiā Rōmē sūnt dūō pāpē;
Ēt sī plūs clērī || iām dēbēnt lūmīnā qūērī,
Sūb mōdīō tēctā || lātītāt lūcērmā rēiēctā:

The majority of lines have three long syllables right before the caesura, often a three-syllable
word, for example, *humanum, discernit, obscurum, prestabit, claustrali, pallescit, moralis, lucerne, velamen, exemplum, perfudit, pastorum*. Only three lines show the pattern dactyl, dactyl,
long syllaable before the caesura (4, 7, 24). Indeed, Gower’s rhyming verse is remarkably

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21 The metrical pattern for dactylic hexameter is $-uu| -uu|-|uu|-uu|-uu|-x$, although a spondee (two long syllables) may replace any of the dactyls except the fifth one. Long
vowels and long syllables (which may in fact contain a short vowel) are marked with a macron.
spondaic. In the *Vox* about 25% of hexameter lines begin with either two or three dactyls. In the *Cronica* about 4% of hexameter lines begin in this way. In the *Vox* about 4% of hexameter lines begin with two or three spondees; in the *Cronica* about 20% begin thus (about 8% begin with four spondees).\(^{22}\) Why such rhyming verse should be spondaic is not clear.

One other result of Gower’s rhyming style is that, generally speaking, his rhyming verse is easier for the modern reader to construe and understand. Each line tends to be a free-standing statement with two clauses. Anything resembling a distich, any enjambment, is rare. Addressing Henry in *O Recolende*, for instance, the poet suggests that the king

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Turn towards the good} & \parallel \text{those he snatched from Pharaoh} \\
\text{Remove the troubles} & \parallel \text{with which our land has struggled} \\
\text{So that the realm’s people} & \parallel \text{can live reasonably} \\
\text{Establish peace} & \parallel \text{tame the power of the crown} \\
\text{On the laws put} & \parallel \text{curbs without conditions.}
\end{align*}
\]

This rough English translation can follow the Latin almost word for word. Rarely if ever do we find a word salad of the sort found in many lines of the *Vox*, as, for instance, in the following example:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Militat in Cristo pia que pacientia tristi} \\
\text{Materiam vere tempore laudis habet. (Vox 3.355–6)} \\
\text{The meek patience that warred in Christ at a sad time} \\
\text{Is truly the stuff of praise in our time.}
\end{align*}
\]

Here *tristi* is the adjective with *tempore* and *que* (=*quae* fem. singular) is the subject of *militat*. There may be uncertainties about various aspects of Gower’s shorter poems, but his surface meaning is never in doubt.

\(^{22}\) Carlson, “A Rhyme Distribution Chronology of John Gower’s Latin Poetry.” Statistics for dactyls and spondees in the *Vox* and *Cronica* are on 52–3.
Appendix C

Sources for Carmen super Mutiplici Viciorum Pestilencia

As stated in the introduction, Gower’s Carmen super Mutiplici Viciorum Pestilencia (hereafter V.P.) comprises features of three poetic styles: the elegiac meter of the Vox Clamantis, dactylic hexameters with various rhyme schemes, and elegiac poems with internal rhymes. In passages in the first style, unrhymed elegiacs (ll. 20–85, 151–216, 232–297), Gower reuses many lines from the Vox. We list these borrowings, plus one other hitherto unnoticed source. (The notation cp. means that the quotation, while identifiable, is comparable but not verbatim.)

V. P. 50–77, every line comes from Vox 2.439–75, although in a different order.
V. P. 50–1 = Vox 2.471–2.
V. P. 52–3 = Vox 2.469–70.
V. P. 54–5 = Vox 2.443–4.
V. P. 56–7 = Vox 2.439–40.
V. P. 58–9 = Vox 2.475–6.
V. P. 60–1 = Vox 2.445–6.
V. P. 64–5 = Vox 2.449–50.
V. P. 66–7 = Vox 2.451–2.
V. P. 68–9 = Vox 2.453–4.
V. P. 70–1 = Vox 2.456–7.
V. P. 72–3 = Vox 2.457–8.
V. P. 74–5 = Vox 2.459–60.
V. P. 76–7 = Vox 2.465–6.
V. P. 155–8 are adapted from or inspired by some contemporary work, perhaps a sermon, devotional tract, or poem. Anonymous verses by other authors show similar inspiration. One example:

Quatuor his poenis Certo afficietur adulter,
Aut Egenus erit Subita vel morte peribit,

Aut Cadet in causam qua debet Iudice vinci,
Aut aliquod membrum casu vel Crymine perdit.  

An adulterer will certainly be afflicted with four penalties:
He will be either Poor or will die a sudden death,
Or he will be charged in a case which he should lose before the judge,
Or he will lose a limb either by chance or for a crime.

Another possibility:

Quinque modis peccat uxor maritus abutens:
Tempore, mente, loco, condicione, modo.
Ex istis quinque penis plectetur adulter.
Aut hic fit pauper, aut hic subito morietur;
Aut erit insanus merito, vel carcere tentus;
Aut aliquod membrum casu vel vulnere perdet.

A husband who abuses his wife sins in five modes:
Time, intention, place, status, manner.
From these the adulterer is punished with five penalties.
Either he becomes poor or he suddenly dies;
Or he will be insane or held in prison;
Or he will lose a limb by accident or from a wound.

V. P. 163–4 = Vox 5.139–40 with errat instead of languet.
V. P. 167–8 = Vox 5.235–6.
V. P. 169–70 = Vox 5.239–40.
V. P. 177 = Vox 3.1627.
V. P. 179 cp. Vox 7.373 (from the Speculum Stultorum).
V.P. 181–2 same as Vox 6.861–2.
V.P. 185 = Vox 7.459.
V.P. 186 = Vox 7.920.
V.P. 187 = Vox 7.469.
V.P. 191 cp. Vox 7.625.

24 Robert Greene apparently quotes this same poem in Greenes Farewell to Folly, published in London in 1591.
V.P. 196 = Vox 7.150.
V.P. 197–8 = Vox 5.175–6.
V.P. 199–200 cp. Vox 2.112.
V.P. 199 cp. Vox 5.165 (Pendula instead of Credula).
V.P. 200 cp. Vox 2.112.
V.P. 201–2 cp. Vox 5.211–2 (2nd person instead of 3rd).
V.P. 205–6 = Vox 5.161–2.
V.P. 207–8 = Vox 5.215–6.
V.P. 209 cp. Vox 7.1155.
V.P. 212 cp. Vox 7.1052.
V.P. 213–4 = Vox 7.887–8.
V.P. 215 = Vox 7.910.
V.P. 246 = Vox 6.445.
V.P. 247, cp. Vox 6.140.
V.P. 248ff, parallel in thought to Vox 6.449ff.
V.P. 260–1 = Vox 7.297–8.
V.P. 262–3 = Vox 7.313–4.
V.P. 264–5 = Vox 351–2.
V.P. 270 = Vox 7.301.
V.P. 271 = Vox 7.300. (270 and 271 in reverse order in Vox).
V.P. 274–5 = Vox 341–2.
V.P. 288–9 = Vox 7.427–8.


