

Introduction: Gower and Anglo-Latin Verse

Small time, in little room, justifies the title of this collocation of studies and texts, to do with the verse in Latin of the English writer John Gower (d. 1408), “the most significant Anglo-Latin poet of the fourteenth century.”¹ The quick forge and working-house of Latin verse were unparalleledly busy at the late-medieval moment of Gower’s inhabitation, it happens. Moreover, Gower picked up and put down his varying Latin tools often, being an assiduous reviser much attent to immediate social-literary conditions as well as a polyglot. Varieties of Latin were in use, and their relations with the local congenetic vernaculars varied too. Living language differences – French, Latin, English – did yet signify; a singular categorial concept of Latin, however, simply to be counterpoised against England’s other current literary languages, is inadequate to account for the goings-on. So small time in little room explains why Gower’s Latin verse is the way it is.

The poet was present-oriented, and his geographic purview was narrow. By varying literary-generic means, chiefly allegory and exemplary narrative – in all three of the chief languages – Gower dramatized the contradictions of the forces of production and relations of production (especially the class struggle) emerging in the historically altering contemporary society in which he lived and practised as a writer. At once mirror and hammer, reflecting and effecting (to the extent that he reached a readership), Gower produced a “history of the present,” as Ethan Knapp put it: a representation of his own “present as history,” in Lukacsian terms, analyzing the determinant historical forces that shaped his present circumstance and criticizing.² Gower was a conservative apologist for

1. A.G. Rigg and Edward S. Moore, “The Latin Works: Politics, Lament and Praise,” in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Siân Echard (Cambridge, 2004), 164.

2. See Ethan Knapp, “John Gower: Balzac of the Fourteenth Century,” in *John Gower in England and Iberia*, ed. Ana Sáez-Hidalgo and R.F. Yeager (Cambridge, 2014), 215–227. The mirror-and-hammer image is from Leon Trotsky, “Futurism” (1925), in *Literature and Revolution*, trans. Rose Strunsky, ed. W. Keach (Chicago, 2005), 120: “To reject art as a means of picturing and imaging knowledge because of one’s opposition to the contemplative and impressionistic bourgeois art of the last few decades, is to strike from the hands of the class which is building a new society its most important weapon. Art, it is said, is not a mirror, but a hammer: it does not reflect, it shapes.”

the way things ought to be, or as things had once purportedly been: “unstintingly conservative in the best, as well as the worst, sense,” as R.F. Yeager wrote.³ Still, Gower was critical of the failures and shortcomings of the contemporary political economy, with its social and personal sublimates – *inter alia*, the spheres of literature and ideology, variously over- and under-determined⁴ – and these he set himself to rectify by what means he disposed, which were exclusively literary. Gower was a satirist, in other words, if only in his own self-representation:

Ad mundum mitto mea iacula, dumque sagitto;
 At vbi iustus erit, nulla sagitta ferit.
 Sed male viuentes hos vulnero transgredientes;
 Conscijs ergo sibi se speculetur ibi.

So at the world is where I aim my bow when I
 Go shooting. But no blow lands where the righteous stand.
 Instead, I only wound whom I find living wrongfully.
 Do know yourselves, therefore: you may find yourselves herein.⁵

Because these lines are so often quoted and translated, their formal properties may go unnoticed: bisyllabic-rhyming Leonine elegiac distichs, however; for the forms of the Latin verse Gower wrote are alike local and contemporary, rather than being fetched in from further afield or longer ago.

The point may as well be established by the instance of Gower’s reuses of a line from Q. Horatius Flaccus (65–27 BCE). Gower was not much interested in the ancient poetry, or other no longer current literary work. What Gower knew and could use of others’ earlier verse he persistently remade for present purposes of his own. The long-studied Augustan lyricist and satirist had occasion to address a student-correspondent on the matter of the Homeric representation of the Trojan war in the *Iliad*:

3. R.F. Yeager, “Gower’s Lancastrian Affinity: The Iberian Connection,” *Viator* 35 (2004): 491.

4. For the former, see Louis Althusser, “Contradiction and Overdetermination,” in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (1969; repr. London, 2005), 87–116; for the latter, see Samir Amin, e.g., *Eurocentrism*, trans. Russell Moore and James Membrez, 2nd. ed. (New York, 2009), 90–92.

5. Text and translation are from John Gower, *Poems on Contemporary Events: The Visio Anglie (1381) and Cronica tripartita (1400)*, ed. David R. Carlson, trans. A.G. Rigg (Toronto and Oxford, 2011), 1.

Fabula, qua Paridis propter narratur amorem
 Graecia barbariae lento collisa duello,
 stultorum regum et populorum continet aestus.
 Antenor censet belli praecidere causam:
 quid Paris? ut salvus regnet vivatque beatus
 cogi posse negat. Nestor componere litis
 inter Peliden festinat et inter Atriden;
 hunc amor, ira quidem communiter urit utrumque.
 quidquid delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi.
 seditione, dolis, scelere atque libidine et ira
 Iliacos intra muros peccatur et extra.

The story in which it is told how, because of Paris's love Greece clashed in tedious war with a foreign land, embraces the passions of foolish kings and peoples. [On the Trojan side,] Antenor moves to cut away the cause of the war. What of Paris? To reign in safety and to live in happiness – nothing, he says, can force him. [On the Greek side,] Nestor is eager to settle the strife between the sons of Peleus [sc. Achilles] and of Atreus [sc. Agamemnon]. Love fires one, but anger both in common. Whatever folly the kings commit, the Achaeans pay the penalty. With faction, craft, crime, lust, and wrath, within and without the walls of Troy all goes wrong.⁶

This is the Greek history: a tale of irreconcilable divisions within peoples, as Horace has it, on the Trojan side as well as the Argive: “Iliacos intra muros peccatur et extra.” Moreover, the *seditiones* within the peoples' leaderships not only caused the war's continuation, they also set leaders against peoples – doubled division, in other words: “stultorum regum et populorum aestus” – for whatever the *reges* decide, however poorly, their peoples suffer: “quidquid delirant reges, plectuntur Achivi.”

Here, if anywhere, it might be felt, Gower ought to have fastened on to this something in Horace: a Horatian metrical locution itself focused on the centripetal point of the *Confessio amantis*, Gower's greatest poem, namely, the dangers of dread *DIVISIO*. For the long poem's “principal theme,” Derek Pearsall has it, is “the idea that division is the source of all evil.”⁷

6. Horace, *Epistles* 1.2.6–16, trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, in Horace, *Satires, Epistles, and Ars poetica*, rev. ed. (Cambridge, MA, 1929), 263.

7. Derek A. Pearsall, “Gower's Narrative Art,” *PMLA* 81 (1966): 475–484, at 476; cf. Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics in Gower's Confessio amantis* (Ann Arbor, 2005), 118–125; see also Hugh White, “Division and Failure in Gower's *Confessio amantis*,” *Neophilologus* 72 (1988): 600–616.

It develops that Gower does use this crucial line of Horace; he uses it at least three times, yet without any indication that he knew the line's Horatian-Homeric context and reference, or the Horatian source.⁸

"Quicquid delirant reges, plectuntur Achiui" is supplied as a marginal comment on the lines of the *Confessio amantis*:

Fulofte er this it hath be sein,
The comun poeple is overlein
And hath the kinges senne aboght,
Although the poeple agulte noght.⁹

"The comun poeple is overlein | And hath the kinges senne aboght" appears to be nearly a translation of the Horatian line, though it is not: the notion of "kinges senne" is anachronism. The marginalised Horace is more in the nature of an analogue here, Gower's belated glossing of a line all his own.

No more is there any sense of debt or context when Gower uses the same line again in the "Epistola ad regem" section of the *Vox clamantis*, where it makes the first (hexametric) line of one of Gower's distichs:

Quicquid delirant reges plectuntur Achivi,
Nam caput infirmum membra dolere facit.

Whatever kings rave, the Achaeans are beaten,
For an unsound head makes the limbs suffer.¹⁰

Still with no acknowledgement of the ancient classical source, Gower's third use of the line comes in his later confection "O deus immense":

Quicquid delirant reges plectuntur Achivi,
Quo mala respirant, ubi mores sunt fugitivi.

8. The analysis is based on Siân Echard, "The Long and the Short of It: On Gower's Forms," in *John Gower in England and Iberia: Manuscripts, Influences, Reception*, ed. Ana Sáez-Hidalgo and R.F. Yeager (Cambridge, 2014), 253–254. Gower's reuses of the Horatian line are discussed again in chapter 1 below (pp. 35–36), differently, in evidence of Gower's revisionary practice; and a different poet's contemporary, *fere* proverbial (unattributed) use of it is quoted in David R. Carlson, *John Gower, Poetry and Propaganda in Fourteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, 2012), 22.

9. *Conf.* 7.3929–3932.

10. *Vox* 6.497–498; translation by R.J. Meindl, from gowertranslation.pbworks.com/w/page/53715438/vox%20clamantis%20translations.

Where monarchs run crazed, the people are penalized;
Where evils respire, there morals are exiled.¹¹

What Gower does on this third occasion is turn the line into half of a collaterally bisyllabic-rhymed Leonine couplet of hexameters, *delirant* making rhyme with *respirant* and *Achivi* with *fugitivi*: not classical, but contemporary. The Horatian line that Gower knew, though he does not appear to have known that it was Horace, despite its metrical properties, apparently knowing it only as some deracinate proverb, he makes over into his own late Latin style – a high- or late-medieval scholastic style, moreover, that is, the antithesis of the Augustan, though it is at once also the apogee of achievement in Gower’s progress as a Latin poet.

Generally, this is the case. The poetry of P. Ovidius Naso (43 BCE–17 CE) is something of an exception, in some respects, sometimes.¹² Broadly speaking, however, Gower’s knowledge of ancient poetry (exclusively a Latin poetry for Gower) – even the traditionally classical Latin poetry, from C. Valerius Catullus (d. ca. 54 BCE), or, more narrowly still, from P. Vergilius Maro (70–19 BCE) to Ovid – was poor (let alone the Roman prose); likewise, his appreciation of anything like the ancient civilization that grew up around the Mediterranean basin, east and west, African, West Asian, and southern European, from the earliest records of circa 3000 BCE to perhaps 650 CE, or of classical antiquity proper, from the first Greek Olympiad (776 BCE) or Rome’s foundation (753 BCE) to the end of the Roman Empire (ca. 410 or 476 CE). He was not much given to attempting to imagine these ancient worlds that were other than his own; in contrast to Geoffrey Chaucer (d. 1400), Gower’s antiquity “seems narrowly and traditionally insular.”¹³

Evidence is that Gower had some knowledge of the contemporary curricular verse authors: the canonical *auctores* of the *libri Catoniani* that people (boys) learned in school, a graduated series of readings, from simple to the somewhat

11. Gower, “O deus immense” 5–6; trans. Echard, “The Long and the Short of It,” 253.

12. See Bruce Harbert, “Lessons from the Great Clerk: Ovid and John Gower,” in *Ovid Renewed: Ovidian Influences on Literature and Art*, ed. Charles Martindale (Cambridge, 1988), 84: the “poet whose work Gower knew better than any other” was Ovid – “the whole of Ovid,” moreover, since it is demonstrable that Gower “drew on every part of Ovid’s work.” See also Bruce Harbert, “The Myth of Tereus in Ovid and Gower,” *Medium Aevum* 41 (1972): 208–214, at 214. The fundamental analysis remains Pearsall, “Gower’s Narrative Art,” esp. 478–481.

13. Andrew S. Galloway, “Gower’s Ovids,” in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature*, vol. 1, 800–1558, ed. Rita Copeland (Oxford, 2016), 436. See also A.J. Minnis, “Other Worlds: Chaucer’s Classicism,” in the same volume, 413–434.

more complex, though hardly classical in the usual sense: the *Disticha Catonis*, the Carolingian *Ecloga Theoduli* (useful for basic Greek philosophical vocabulary), the fabulist Avianus (fl. ca. 400), Maximianus (fl. ca. 525) the pornographer, the *De raptu Proserpinae* of Claudius Claudianus (ca. 370–ca. 404), and the *Achilleid* of P. Papinius Statius (ca. 50–ca. 96).¹⁴ The *Officia* of M. Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE) may belong in this category, for Gower demonstrates some knowledge of it, though he also wrote as if “Tullius” and “Cicero” were separate persons.¹⁵ In addition to the *Officia*, Gower quotes the *disticha Catonis*, and he quotes Maximianus; also, he used Avianus, and he used Statius, both in ways that indicate familiarity.¹⁶

Beyond these basics, however, there is little or nothing of classical or other earlier Latin poetry in Gower. No matter such rare or difficult ancient Latin writers as Septimius Serenus or Lucius Apuleius, the striking case is Virgil. Though Gower knew who Virgil was – he repeats unclassical biographical traditions about him¹⁷ – he did not much know Virgil’s poetry. Gower never cites

14. On this canon of verse *auctores* and their English influence, see esp. Jill Mann, “He Knew Nat Catoun’: Medieval School-Texts and Middle English Literature,” in *The Text in the Community*, ed. Jill Mann and Maura Nolan (Notre Dame, 2006), 44–53; see also Christopher Cannon, “The Middle English Writer’s Schoolroom,” *New Medieval Literatures* 11 (2009): 19–38, esp. 23–27 and 34–35; and Ralph Hanna III, “Literacy, Schooling, Universities,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval English Culture*, ed. Andrew Galloway (Cambridge, 2011), 177–181. The fundamental work remains that of Marc Boas, “De librorum Catonianorum historia atque compositione,” *Mnemosyne* 42 (1914): 17–46.

15. See Galloway, “Gower’s Ovids,” 436–437. It is the case here too that, despite confusion, Gower had some grasp of the names’ basic literary-cultural association. See *Conf.* 4.2647–2652: “And thilke time at Rome also | Was Tullius with Cithero, | That written upon Rethorike, | Hou that men schal the wordes pike | After the forme of eloquence, | Which is, men sein, a gret prudence.” For Gower’s use of the *Officia*, see John A. Burrow, “The Portrayal of Amans in *Confessio amantis*,” in *Gower’s Confessio amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. A.J. Minnis (Cambridge, 1983), 14–15.

16. Some quotations from the *Disticha* are noted in Gower, *Poems on Contemporary Events*, 356–358 and 401. On Avianus, see R.F. Yeager, “‘Scripture veteris capiunt exempla futuri,’” in *Retelling Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn and Alan Lupack (Cambridge, 1997), 341–354. On Maximianus, see David R. Carlson, “Gower’s Amans and the Curricular Maximianus,” *Studia Neophilologica* 89 (2017): 67–80. On Statius, see Winthrop Wetherbee, “Statius,” in *The Oxford History of Classical Reception in English Literature*, vol. 1, 800–1558, ed. Rita Copeland (Oxford, 2016), 243–244, and Andrew Galloway, “Gower’s Classicizing Vocations,” in *Routledge Research Companion to John Gower*, ed. Ana Sáez-Hidalgo et al. (London, 2017), 273; but for a contrary view, see George Hamilton, “Gower’s Use of the Enlarged Roman *de Troie*,” *PMLA* 20 (1905): 179–196.

17. See Michael P. Kuczynski, “Gower’s Virgil,” in *On John Gower: Essays at the Millennium*, ed. R.F. Yeager (Kalamazoo, 2007), 161–187.

Virgil, and he quotes him only rarely, perhaps twice or three times; moreover, when he appears to quote Virgil, he uses only *fere* proverbial phrases – “latet anguis in herba,” “omnia vincit amor,” etc. – which he does not seem to have regarded as Virgilian; or he uses the topic of Fama’s pervasion of Carthage in the *Aeneid* – “magnas it Fama per urbes” (4.173), etc. – still without express attribution.¹⁸

The pattern repeats too in the familiar exception to Gower’s ancient oblivion, for Gower assimilates and contemporizes his Ovid, much as he did with the little he knew of Horace or Virgil. Ovid’s obscene *Remedia amoris* sometimes substituted for the obscene Maximianus in the standard curriculum;¹⁹ whether or not such a substitution provided Gower’s introduction in boyhood, Gower learned Ovid at some point, probably rather later – all of Ovid, moreover, intimately and thoroughly.

It is a considerable paradox that the attentions of “moral” Gower should have fastened in this way – excluding all others – on the most notoriously immoral of the Roman poets: criminally immoral, it developed.²⁰ “perdiderint cum me duo crimina, carmen et error” (Ovid, *Tristia* 2.207): the *error* remains inscrutable; Ovid’s criminal *carmen* was something of the erotic verse, however, almost certainly; and he was the one Augustan writer sentenced to relegation by reason of what he wrote.²¹ He made no return.

In the same vein, the same classical poet’s epic of mutability, itself enacting mutation upon itself over and again, often provided matter for this later writer who set himself so against degenerative change as to use the shattering of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream statue to begin and to end his major writings *Confessio*

18. See Harbert, “Lessons from the Great Clerk,” 86; cf. Götz Schmitz, “Gower, Chaucer, and the Classics,” in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, ed. R.F. Yeager (Kalamazoo, 1989), 104–105. See also David R. Carlson, “Gower *Agonistes* and Chaucer on Ovid (and Virgil),” *Modern Language Review* 109 (2014): 947–951.

19. See Boas, “De librorum Catonianorum historia,” 39, and Eva Matthews Sanford, “The Use of Classical Latin Authors in the *Libri manuales*,” *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 55 (1924): 190–248, at 200; with the comments of D.E.H. Alton, “Ovid in the Mediaeval Schoolroom,” ed. D.E.W. Wormell, *Hermathena* 94 (1960): 30–33 and 38.

20. This paradox and the following are from Jeremy Dimmick, “Ovid in the Middle Ages,” in *Cambridge Companion to Ovid*, ed. Philip R. Hardie (Cambridge, 2002), esp. 280–282.

21. The evidence for relegation is reviewed in Ronald Syme, *History in Ovid* (Oxford, 1978), 215–225; for interpretation, see P. Green, “*Carmen et error*: πρόφασις and αἰτία in the Matter of Ovid’s Exile,” *Classical Antiquity* 1 (1982): 202–220, and G.P. Goold, “The Cause of Ovid’s Exile,” *Illinois Classical Studies* 8 (1983): 94–107, *permultos inter alios*.

amantis and *Vox clamantis*.²² Gower decried *DIVISIO* ceaselessly, but often by means of the work of *uates* himself of the ceaseless sameness of all-overturning change: “omnia mutantur, nihil interit.”²³

The attraction may have been Ovid’s persistent disassembly of Roman *mores* through his assaults, overt and covert, on the putative stabilities of the *Pax augusta*, though Ovid’s affronts to the edifice of Augustan morality may also have been meant conservatively, as contributions to putting it right. In any case, Ovid too was a satirist-critic of his own society and state, if often indirectly, while also being a champion of the achievements of the Rome of his imperial majesty, much as was Gower of Ricardian and early Lancastrian England.²⁴

Though he knew the extensive Ovidian corpus, Gower does not imitate Ovid; rather, Gower refashioned Ovid for his own purposes. Gower’s allusive redistributions of numerous phrases and lines of Ovid’s verse in particular passages of his own fashioning, often observed, are well understood.²⁵ For by the

22. On the passages, see Diane Watt, *Amoral Gower* (Minneapolis, 2003), 107–114.

23. Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 15.165. Cf. Deanne Williams, “Gower’s Monster,” in *Postcolonial Approaches to the European Middle Ages*, ed. Ananya Jahanara Kabir and Williams (Cambridge, 2005), 128 in Gower’s *Confessio amantis* “Thematic division expresses itself formally, as well. The orderly structures of medieval scholasticism are evinced by Gower’s deployment of organizational techniques, from *ordinatio* and *compilatio* to rubrication and gloss. [...] These structures work against a fascination with narratives of chaos, metamorphosis and monstrosity that makes this ostensible orderliness spin out of control, and mock its very pretensions.”

24. See Fergus Millar, “Ovid and the *Domus Augusta*,” *Journal of Roman Studies* 83 (1993): 1–17, with Peter E. Knox, “The Poet and the Second Prince,” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 49 (2004): 1–20, and esp. G. Karl Galinsky, “Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and Augustan Cultural Thematics,” in *Ovidian Transformations: Essays on Ovid’s Metamorphoses and Its Reception*, ed. Philip Hardie et al. (Cambridge, 1999), 103–111. For the alternative, see Leo C. Curran, “Transformation and Anti-Augustanism in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*,” *Arethusa* 5 (1972): 71–91.

25. See esp. Yoshiko Kobayashi, “The Voice of an Exile: From Ovidian Lament to Prophecy in Book I of John Gower’s *Vox clamantis*,” in *Through a Classical Eye*, ed. Andrew Galloway and R.F. Yeager (Toronto, 2009), 339–340 and 349–353; Maura Nolan, “The Poetics of Catastrophe: Ovidian Allusion in Gower’s *Vox clamantis*,” in *Medieval Latin and Middle English Literature*, ed. Christopher Cannon and Maura Nolan (Cambridge, 2011), 129–131, with explication of *Visio* 2131–2150; and Kathryn L. McKinley, “Gower and Chaucer: Readings of Ovid in Late Medieval England,” in *Ovid in the Middle Ages*, ed. James G. Clark et al. (Cambridge, 2011), 201–206; see also David R. Carlson, “A Fourteenth-Century Anglo-Latin Ovidian,” *Classica et Mediaevalia* 61 (2010): 293–335, and “Gower *Agonistes*,” 933–943; Andrew Galloway, “Gower in His Most Learned Role and the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381,” *Mediaevalia* 16 (1993): 341–343; and most fundamentally, R.F. Yeager, *John Gower’s Poetic* (Cambridge, 1990), 46–60, with his earlier remarks in “Did Gower Write *Cento*?” in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, ed. Yeager (Kalamazoo, 1989), 113–132.

allusions, Gower appropriates Ovid's terms for serving purposes of his own. By the same token, in respect of style, what Gower did again and again was remake Ovid as his own: use Ovid but for fashioning a distinctively Gowerian late-medieval Anglo-Latin verse.

When Gower alludes to Ovid in the way he does in his earlier Latin verse, it may sometimes appear that he was imitating Ovid, fashioning his verses as Ovid had, or the other Roman elegists. Near his return home in the *Visio Anglie*, for example, Gower's narrator laments:

O tibi quem presens spectabile non sinit ortus
 Cernere, quam melior sors tua sorte mea est!
 Heu! Mea consueto quia mors nec erit michi lecto,
 Depositum nec me qui fleat vllus erit.
 Spiritus ipse meus si nunc exhibit in auras,
 Non positos artus vnget amica manus.

O you, whose birth won't let you see what's here
 To see, your lot is better far than mine!
 Alas, my death won't come in wonted bed;
 No one will mourn my body where it lies.
 If now my breath should vanish in the wind,
 No friendly hand will smear my limbs with oil.²⁶

A giveaway is the phrase “positos artus vnget,” for the Homeric limb-unguenting was no part of funerary ritual in Gower's day. Gower's remark is much like Ovid's in the Ariadne-Theseo epistle of the *Heroides*, “nec positos artus unguet amicos” (10.122); and the same *Visio Anglie* passage also quotes and paraphrases a series of lines from *Tristia* 3.3 – the *carmen* in which Ovid transmits to his spouse a copy of the inscription he composed for his own tomb – including here the “labentes oculos condet amica manus” phrase (*Tristia* 3.3.44) that Gower is combining with other elements from the *Heroides* line, as well as “nec mea consueto languescit corpora lecto, | depositum nec me qui fleat, ullus erit” (*Tristia* 3.3.39–40).²⁷

The final phrase of Gower's lines “non sinit ortus | Cernere, quam melior sors tua sorte mea est” is of special interest, for two reasons. It fetches up in Ovid repeatedly: in *Tristia* 5.4.4 (“Heu quanto melior sors tua sorte mea est”), in the

26. *Visio* 1533–1538; trans. Rigg, in Gower, *Poems on Contemporary Events*, 130–133.

27. On the passage, see also Carlson, “A Fourteenth-Century Anglo-Latin Ovidian,” 325–326.

Visio passage adjacent the other lines that Gower uses from the same poem; but also again and again, in *Amores* 1.6.46 (“heu melior quanto sors tua sorte mea est”) and *Fasti* 4.520 (“heu melior quanto sors tua sorte mea est”). Occurs too the substantively similar line, *Tristia* 5.12.6 (“sorte nec ulla mea tristior esse potest”), itself quoted later in full at *Visio* 1780: “Sorte nec vlla mea tristior esse potest.” Also, Gower’s quotation “quam melior sors tua sorte mea est” is the only point in the *Visio Anglie* where he ends a pentameter with something other than a bisyllabic term – and it is a very rare instance of elision in Gower’s Latin verse.²⁸

In addition to being a significant elider of word-final vowels (and the terminal nasal *m*) before word-initial vowels (and initial *h*), Ovid bears some responsibility for the prevalence of bisyllabic-word endings in pentameters, along with the other earlier contributors to the elaboration of Roman elegy, chiefly Catullus, Albius Tibullus (ca. 55–19 BCE), and Sextus Propertius (d. ca. 15 BCE) – none of whom Gower would seem to have seen. On the other hand, even Ovid’s practice is significantly more variable, more plastic, than Gower’s: especially in his latest verse, Ovid used a variety of pentameter endings.²⁹ But not Gower. All elsewhere in the *Visio Anglie*, Gower ends his pentameters always with bisyllabic terms, excepting this one instance where he was quoting Ovid. And the only other elision in the *Visio Anglie* is another Ovid quotation: the hexameter-ending “seveque (a)vidissima cedis” (753) is from the Lycaon episode at the beginning of the *Metamorphoses* “saevaeque (a)vidissima caedis” (1.161).³⁰

So if Gower’s verse in the sample passage above sounds some like Ovid, it is because it is Ovid, some. Only up to a point, however: parts of the passage are Ovid’s writing rather than Gower’s. For the rest, simple reading suffices to establish it that, on a fundamental level, Gower’s verse is not Ovidian or Virgilian or anything like. Despite the quotations, Gower’s verses retain contemporary shapes. For he relies on unclassical, non-Ovidian prosodic principles to make his verse: vowel lengthening before the strong caesura, shortened final *o*, and so on, including the bisyllabic-term endings of his pentameters and the avoidance of elision.³¹

28. See chapter 2 below, pp. 67–68 and 72.

29. On the polysyllabic pentameter endings and elision, see Maurice Platnauer, *Latin Elegiac Verse* (Cambridge, 1951), 15–17 and 72–90; on elision, see esp. J.C. McKeown, ed., *Ovid: Amores I; Text and Prolegomena* (Liverpool, 1987), 114–115 and 119–121, with, in broadened literary historical perspective, Janet Martin, “Classicism and Style in Latin Literature,” in *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, ed. Robert L. Benson and Giles Constable (Oxford, 1982; repr. Toronto, 1991), 561–562.

30. Gower appears to imitate the same Ovidian phrase again but in a way that obviates the need for elision. See *Visio* 927: “seuaque cupidine scedis.”

31. Some instances are listed below in chapter 2, note 50.

Gower's Latin verse, fundamentally not classical, is contemporary-modern in other ways too, besides its disposition towards elision. Rather than looking to some more distant past, classical-ancient or earlier medieval – Dark Age epic, say, or even Arthurian legend – Gower reacted to what was going on around him, more or less immediately, and he did not look much beyond a narrow northwestern European ambit for most of the contemporary substantive and literary models that he used.

Gower studied high- and late-medieval Latin poetry more often than he did the less proximate poetry of Ovid, let alone other classical Latin poets. *De uita monachorum*, for example, is now rather less admired than the Ovidian *Metamorphoses*, for various reasons, and less studied. The widely circulated eight hundred-line version of the material that Gower knew was usually attributed to the English scholar-poet Alexander Neckam (1157–1217), who served King Richard I *Coeur de Lion* (d. 1199), though often the material in it was drawn from the likewise high-medieval poetry of the archbishop of Canterbury Anselm (d. 1109). Gower adapted the verse of this *De uita monachorum* – often taking lines of it verbatim over into his own verse, as with Ovid – in the “Epistola ad iudices” section of the *Vox clamantis* (6.309–418) especially, though also elsewhere.³² Moreover, Gower made similar adaptive use of the prosimetric world-historical *Pantheon* (ca. 1191) of Godfrey of Viterbo, “siue uniuersalis libri qui chronici appellantur, omnes omnium seculorum et gentium, tam sacras quam prophanas historias complectentes” (Or, the books of all things, called chronicles, embracing all histories of all ages and nations, both sacred and profane) – a massive undertaking that, for all the contemporary interest in it, has not attracted a modern edition – as well as the *Aurora* of Peter Riga (d. 1209), the high-medieval versification of the Christian Bible, compacted with extensive allegorical-interpretive materials, all alike in verse, likewise a massive, widely circulating book.³³ Most significant for Gower must have been the allegorical verse satire *Speculum stultorum* of Nigel Wireker, also of the late twelfth century and of English origin, with inset oratorical estates satires on the orders of the religious and on offices of leadership, secular and clerical.³⁴

32. On the attribution to Neckam, see Rigg, *History*, 65. On Gower's use, see Meindl, “Gower's *Speculum Iudicis*,” in *John Gower: Others and the Self*, ed. R.A. Peck and Yeager (Cambridge, 2017), 276 and 282; also below, chapter 1, pp. 39 and 41.

33. On the *Pantheon*, see Gower, *Poems on Contemporary Events*, 10–11; on the *Aurora*, see chapter 1 below, pp. 37–39.

34. On the *Speculum stultorum*, see esp. Jill Mann, *From Aesop to Reynard: Beast Literature in Medieval Britain* (Oxford, 2009), 98–148 and 312–317. On Gower's particular debts to it, see Robert R. Raymo, “Gower's *Vox clamantis* and the *Speculum stultorum*,” *Modern*

If Gower's verse sounds like that of such high-medieval Anglo-Latin poets as these whom he quoted, it is because Gower's verse is that of these other high-medieval Anglo-Latin poets too. Only in part, however: for Gower was himself an Anglo-Latin poet, more late medieval than high. Gower uses lines and phrases from his near contemporaries, more characteristically than he uses lines and phrases from Ovid; more consequentially, however, Gower's Latin work was informed by and indebted to contemporary Anglo-Latin poetry for the metrical fabric of his writing, both by way of emulation and by way of abreaction. Gower's Latin verse makes better sense in this synchronic perspective, by virtue of its relations with more nearly contemporary Latin poets, than in the diachronic perspective of classical or earlier medieval verse.

Latin did die, properly, soon after Gower did, in the fifteenth century, when humanism undertook to limit the possibilities by insisting on a strict emulation of classical models: good Latin, or, Latin properly so called. The kind of Ciceronianism that confined word choice to vocabulary attested in what writings survived of the ancient orator and philosopher (an epistolographer too) may be the best known instance. By such means, the humanist movement killed Latin, not introducing anything new. Rather, by eliminating varieties, it reduced Latin to a *strix*-like vestigial practice.³⁵ The renaissance Latin of the humanists was dead Latin. The late-medieval Latin was alive.

For Latin was not one in Gower's day; Latin was many.³⁶ By the late fourteenth century, Latin verse especially may have been less dead than it had been at any point during its post-classical history, during its whole history possibly. Not to mention the accumulated, constantly renewing verbal resources, or the elaboration of rhythmical prose, or the unclassical development of alliteration in Anglo-Latin – “the hypertrophy of late Medieval Latin and its

Language Notes 70 (1955): 315–320. For Chaucer's use of it, see Jill Mann, “The *Speculum stultorum* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale*,” *Chaucer Review* 9 (1975): 262–282.

35. See A.G. Rigg, “Crossing Generic Boundaries,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Latin*, ed. Ralph Hexter and David Townsend (Oxford, 2012), 281: “In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries a shift in literary taste began that had the effect of a pedagogical contraceptive pill. By reverting to classical standards of Latin grammar, style, orthography, meter, and textual criticism, Humanism put the brake on and eventually stopped most of the inventiveness of late medieval Latin literary endeavors and frivolities.”

36. See Tim William Machan, “Medieval Multilingualism and Gower's Literary Practice,” *Studies in Philology* 103 (2006): 1–25, at 12: likewise, in transactional practice, “Latin did not always do or mean the same thing, in other words, nor did the ability to speak more than one language.”

creativity in production as in language,” in Ralph Hexter’s estimate – there was a wider variety of verse forms in current practice than before or after.³⁷

In northern Europe and England, scholasticism invented varieties of rhyme in dactylic verse – especially the Leonine, based on line-medial (caesural) and line-final rhyme – and then elaborated them: into couplet combinations of various sorts, and into forms of polyrhyme – *trini salientes*, *dactylici tripertiti*, and so forth, involving varieties of lines having more than two rhymes per line – which were susceptible of other combinations, with themselves or with the relatively simpler bisyllabic-rhyming Leonines.

Moreover, in addition to these elaborations within the metrical-quantitative verse system of the dactylic metres, the high- and late-medieval Latin poets developed an alternative rhythmic-accentual verse – unknown for Latin earlier – where lines were measured by syllable counts and line-final patterns of stress accent, as in the vernacular languages. Though only two types of line-final stress need be disposed, line length was altogether flexible (to the point of being often confounding for analysis), and the innumerable possible combinations of differing lengths of line, ending in the two differing stress patterns, in differing patterns of rhyme, enabled numerically imponderable varieties of stanzaic arrangement and combination. This rhythmic-accentual Latin verse tended to settle into recognizable formal-generic patterns; the formerly so-called “Goliardic” poetry may be best known now, though within it too there developed differing national schools over the course of the later twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, to include eventually the Anglo-Latin anti-fraternal verse of the Edwardian and Ricardian decades.³⁸

A homologous organization within the English-language literature is used for structuring understandings of it – the differences between the English rhymed accentual-syllabic verse and the alliterative, above all; also, within the alliterative, between southwestern and northern traditions; and, within the courtly-rhymed verse, between the tetrameter forms, in which Gower persisted but which

37. See Ralph Hexter, “From the Medieval Historiography of Latin Literature to the Historiography of Medieval Latin Literature,” *Journal of Medieval Latin* 15 (2005): 1–24, at 23. On the variety of verse forms, see Jean-Yves Tilliette, “Verse Style,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Medieval Latin*, 239–264; on variety within high medieval quantitative verse alone, see Martin, “Classicism and Style,” 551–563; and on the contemporary rhythmical-rhymed prose, see Ian Cornelius, “The Rhetoric of Advancement: *Ars dictaminis*, *cursus*, and Clerical Careerism in Late Medieval England,” *New Medieval Literatures* 12 (2010): 287–328; also David R. Carlson, “Feriby’s ‘Lament for Richard II’ and the English Literary History ca. 1400,” *Chaucer Review* 54 (2019): 387–396.

38. See chapter 4 below, pp. 130–131.

Chaucer abandoned, and the pentameter line that Chaucer adopted conclusively (not to mention the ballad-like metres met in English-language romance). Though the *Gawain* poet cannot be simply emplaced, the amalgamation of verse types that characterizes the poet's work – in stanzas of rhymed lines that also alliterate, in varying lengths and combinations – makes sense by virtue of its situation in relation to the two normally segregate kinds of contemporary English-language poetry.

Faced with a like vital diversity in Anglo-Latin, rather than sampling the full range of formal possibilities that the current Latin verse traditions offered, Gower chose. He did not try the rhythmic-accentual verse in Latin, as far as is recorded, nor stanzaic arrangements much, though he used such forms for French and English. It is to be argued, nonetheless, that Gower reacted to the contemporary varieties within Latin when he chose to write as he did in the language. Gower was a modern poet in this respect too: in fashioning the corpus of his Latin verse, rather than addressing himself to deeper pasts or more distant regions, he concentrated on his here-and-now. He persistently addressed himself to local, contemporary affairs in style as in substance.

The chapters that follow amount to an adumbration of Gower's developmental *cursus* in Latin verse, from earliest to last. From sometimes uninformative materials – misleading even, despite the great extent of the remains – emerges a literary-traditional story: small start, in mimesis; grand finish.

From beginning to end, moreover, *in ipsa mutabilitate constantia* is the Ovidian-Boethian paradox for describing what Gower did: the only constant is change.³⁹ For Gower was a rewriter, “matched among medieval English writers in his dedication as a reviser only by Langland.”⁴⁰ The first chapter, “Gower's Earliest Latin Poetry,” establishes that, in addition to the near-constant verbal readjustment evident in the extensive manuscript remains, Gower was ever refashioning and recombining old matter into new work, even early in his career. When Gower assembled the earliest version of the *Vox clamantis* in the late 1370s, without the *Visio Anglie* of the 1381 Social Revolt yet in it, he built this, his first major work of Latin verse, by incorporating previously written pieces into a subsuming framework of new verse. Moreover, still later, after the other English

39. Boethius, *Philosophiae consolatio* 2.p1.29–31: “Tu fortunam putas erga te esse mutata[m]; erras. Hi semper eius mores sunt ista natura. Servavit circa te propriam potius in ipsa sui mutabilitate constantiam.”

40. Kathryn L. Lynch, *High Medieval Dream Vision* (Stanford, 1988), 164. For late-career revisions ca. 1405 and after, see David R. Carlson, “Gower on Henry IV's Rule,” *Traditio* 62 (2007): 207–236.

revolution of 1399, when Gower assembled the compound-complex engrossed final form of the complete *opus* – the *Speculum meditantis* + ([*Visio Anglie* + *Vox clamantis*] + *Cronica tripertita*) + *Confessio amantis* – he was still and again recombining pieces from the earliest *Vox clamantis* into the new or at least renovated writings that made up the minor canon – Robert R. Edwards’s term – variously disposed about the major works in the late copies.

Between these beginnings and that end, his revisionary inclinations remaining, Gower’s Latin changed otherwise as well. For the poet altered verse forms too, in ways determined by the contemporary availability of alternative prosodies and other technical stylistic features of Latin verse. Initially, as is established in the second chapter, “Gower and the Invention of Anglo-Latin Public Poetry,” Gower contributed to the development of a plain style in Latin verse. Antecedents there may have been in the near-contemporary Anglo-Latin poetry; more certainly, Gower had followers after; and in any case, the innovative Latin plain style that Gower used for the *Vox clamantis*, in unrhymed dactylic metres, participated in the elaboration of a “public poetry,” in Anne Middleton’s terms, occurring simultaneously in vernacular verse too. The linguistic boundaries were “hazy,” “particularly fluid and perturbed,” as Ralph Hanna has it; moreover, “operative multilingualism is everywhere,” “an achieved trilingualism” “involving individuals variously and simultaneously gifted in English, Anglo-Norman, and Latin.”⁴¹ Gower was an English poet precisely because he inhabited all three of England’s currently eminent literary languages, not just the one. And by no means was Latin then segregated. The fundamental distinction remained that between *litterati* and *illoti*, and the literate – writers and readers, as well as hearers – were always Latin-literate first.

What Gower first did in his earliest major Latin composition – the shorter *Vox clamantis* in six books, comprising books 2–7 of the later long version – was contribute to estates satire, an especially vivid genre at Gower’s moment in consequence of catastrophic change, demographic in origin though also economic, sociopolitical, and ideological in outcomes. A high-medieval, continental-French invention, estates satire also attracted the participation of Gower’s contemporaries William Langland (d. ca. 1390) and Chaucer, as well

41. Ralph Hanna III, “Lambeth Palace Library, MS 260, and the Problem of English Vernacularity,” *Studies in Medieval and Renaissance History* 5 (2008): 131–199, at 132, 134, 168–169, and 141. The most thoroughgoing effort to reinhabit the contemporary functional trilingualism has been the work of R.F. Yeager, especially noteworthy perhaps being the experiment with a polyglot concordance in “Learning to Read in Tongues: Writing Poetry for a Trilingual Culture,” in *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*, ed. Yeager (Victoria, BC, 1991), 115–129.

as various other near-contemporary poets, some using Anglo-Latin, who would have had at least as much influence on Gower's work. For Gower himself worked in the genre in all three of his major poems, French, Latin, and English, over a period of several *lustra* in the central part of his poetic career. The third chapter, "Gower and Estates Satire before Chaucer," shows that in this manifold polyglot body of work Gower was always translating, though the one term covers differing kinds of literary activity. Gower translated from French to Latin, and from French and Latin to English, in the ordinary sense of interlingual transfer. In so doing, he translated other poets; he also translated himself, however, from one into another of his own several *idiomata*. The translating involved not only interlingual-verbal translation, but also prosodic translation, between metrical systems as incommensurable as his differing languages, or as prose and verse. Moreover, Gower's translating in his estates satires was also always a matter of rendering *then* into *now*: some literary-traditional past – howbeit foreshortened – into a differing present. Despite the constancies of Gower's contributions, from poem to poem, from language to language, and from metrical idiom to metrical idiom, the verse of this historian of his own present adjusted itself to the changing circumstance and developed, always in satiric response to immediate contemporary conditions.

The most immediate of Gower's responses to changing contemporary conditions may have been the *Visio Anglie*, written just after the great Social Revolt of 1381 though transmitted only as book 1 of the *Vox clamantis*. It is another paradox of Gower's *opus* that, for reflecting on and intervening in the most immediate, directly experience-driven of his heres-and-nows, Gower adopted a literary technique of alienation – *alieniloquium*, in the Isidorean term, where what is articulated always only stands for something else, never to be simply identified or defined.⁴² Awkwardly enough, Gower used the evasive mediations of his allegory – its terms often taken (literally) from the imperial Roman poet Ovid – for making immediate, direct propaganda against the disordering *DIVISIO* of the day. The Ricardian allegorist blamed the rebels for its eruption, slanting his representation of what had happened in favour rather of a peculiar contemporary notion of peace, as a type of obedience or submission to the established state order.⁴³ It is argued in the fourth chapter, "Gower's

42. On Isidore, *Etymologiae*, 1.37.22, see Martin Irvine, *Making of Textual Culture: "Grammatica" and Literary Theory, 350–1100* (Cambridge, 1994), 231; on allegory more generally, see Sheila Delany, "Substructure and Superstructure: The Politics of Allegory in the Fourteenth Century," *Science and Society* 38 (1974): 257–280.

43. See Ian Cornelius, "Gower and the Peasants' Revolt," *Representations* 131 (2015): 22–51; also, David R. Carlson, "Gower's Beast Allegories in the 1381 *Visio Anglie*," *Philological*

Historiography of 1381 and Prosody,” moreover, that the *Visio Anglie* is set against contemporary seditious disorder also in its versification. In large part, Gower’s early plain style in Latin signifies by virtue of its difference from the rhythmic-accentual verse also current in late Edwardian and Ricardian Anglo-Latin and other writing. This late-medieval rhythmic-accentual verse was characterized additionally by prosodic mixing, of rhythmic-accentual forms with the metrical-quantitative ones of contemporary dactylic verse, and by multilingual language mixes, combining Latin with French or English in various ways within the same piece of writing. Unlike Langland, Gower was not a code-switcher: surprisingly, despite his evident fluency in England’s chief current languages, he did not shift from one to another within individual poems. His periods continue and end in the language with which they began.⁴⁴ Nor was Gower a mixer of prosodies. Rather, consistency itself, in the kind of verse that Gower chose for the *Vox clamantis* and the *Visio Anglie* transmitted within it, and regularity were devices for asserting control in face of a circumstance beyond control in various ways. In the strictly literary-historical terms of verse form, Gower’s election or invention of an Anglo-Latin plain-style dactylic verse too advocates order.

Present circumstance altered again later, and Gower altered his Latin verse practice. The Lancastrian advent of 1399 was the other contemporary revolution that Gower lived and wrote; by this late date, however, he had exchanged his early Latin plain style for something of the high-styled scholastic verse forms current amongst his contemporaries, when he reached thoroughly rhyming Latin verse in his last long Latin poem, the *Cronica tripartita*. The matter of the fifth

Quarterly 87 (2008): 257–275, and *John Gower, Poetry and Propaganda*, 204–209; though see too Yoshiko Kobayashi, “Letters of Old Age: The Advocacy of Peace in the Works of John Gower and Philippe de Mézières,” in *John Gower: Others and the Self*, ed. Russell A. Peck and R.F. Yeager (Cambridge, 2017), 204–222.

44. Some might infer that, by virtue of its notorious Latin apparatus, the *Confessio amantis* is a code-switching performance, though in fact, as Hanna, “Lambeth Palace Library, MS 260,” 145, remarks, it was always the case that “medieval vernacular readers were entirely dependent on non-vernacular, Latinate means of textual access”; cf. Rita Copeland, *Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and Translation: Academic Traditions and Vernacular Texts* (Cambridge, 1991), 203–204. The fundamental point is made by Machan, “Medieval Multilingualism,” 24: “Gower’s literary practice serves as an epitome of late medieval England’s language ecology, which itself produced few creoles or other interlanguages but generally sustained the linguistic repertoire”; and 22: “It is the integrity of Latin, French, and English – the distinction between languages – that enables Gower to create specific rhetorical effects both by drawing on each language’s discursive traditions and by virtue of the distinction itself.” A possible code-switching exception is discussed in chapter 4 below, pp. 123–124; and cf. chapter 1, note 53.

chapter, “Gower’s Late Latin Style,” is rhyme, chiefly, for it was elaborately developed in the dactylic verse that was the other alternative Latin current in Gower’s day, amongst the most literate of contemporary *literati*, who trained professionally in the *poetria nova*. Gower’s early Latin “middel weie” went between the demotic verse of rhythmic-accentual poetry, with its linguistically and metrically mixed forms, all chaotic, on the one hand, and this other high scholastic dactylic verse, on the other, festooned with elaborate rhymes (chaotically enough), the more varied the better. Hierarchy of languages still obtained, apparently, and within languages such hierarchies of verse forms. Gower did not develop rhymes as elaborate as his most highly trained contemporaries; nonetheless, his evolution into a scholastic high-style Latin poet was determined not by some extraliterary impetus, but by literary-internal determinations, deriving from Gower’s prior decision to write in the most tradition-distinguished, elevated language available to him and his local readership: not a vernacular, French or English, but the still vivid, varied Anglo-Latin; in the end, moreover, not any simpler or more demotic variety, but the most authoritative, prestigious Latin still current.

The appendices present editions of other Anglo-Latin poems used at various points in the several chapters to make particular comparative points about Gower’s verse, sometimes formal, sometimes substantive, usually both: instances of the kind of accentual-syllabic verse that Gower did not try, and of the rhymed metrical-quantitative verse that eventually he did, in contrast to the plain-style dactylic verse that mostly he wrote; also, analogues for Gower’s Latin work in eulogy and estates satire, as well as poems on the Social Revolt and the Lollard menace, of more than comparative interest for the English literary history of the Ricardian and early Lancastrian periods. Chiefly for comparative purposes, however, additional appendices also cited in the chapters tabulate some features of metrification and rhyme in Gower and other contemporary Anglo-Latin writers.

The new editions in these appendices are supplied with Modern English translations, as are most of the Latin passages quoted in the chapters, and the French (as well as the combinations of Latin with French and with English). Infrequently, when what is at issue is brief illustration only of some purely formal matter (e.g., a particular type of line-internal rhyme), translation may be omitted. More often, when the point of a longer quotation is predominantly a matter of documenting some formal practice or other that may be complicated in its particulars – patterns of alliteration sustained over a series of lines of verse, for example, or of concatenated polyrhyming lines – translations have been relegated

to footnotes; in such cases, however, translations are supplied, as often as possible from the work of various other translators, not all of them always employing the same approach to the same job. In consequence of still outstanding misapprehensions, be they textual, lexical, syntactic, or linguistic, the translations are not always as successful as might be wished. Nonetheless, the translations help establish that, no matter the linguistic and formal difficulties, excessive as sometimes they must seem, the poetry makes sense; and so the translations intend to facilitate working through the Latin passages (and the multilingual ones), with as much help as can reasonably be provided, in a hope of improving apprehension of these linguistically and stylistically remote areas of late-medieval English literature.