

**Readers as Authors: Reproducing Authority in the
Iberian Translations of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis***

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Although much of medieval scholarship has used contemporary theories of authorship to rethink how medieval readers approached a text, few contemporary analyses use medieval ideas to rethink problems of discursive reproduction. This is unfortunate for two reasons. First, as Umberto Eco's *Name of the Rose* reminds us, the post-modern circulation of texts and images more closely parallels the variegated process of glossing, copying, and transmitting of a medieval codex than the fixed representation of authority by mass print culture. Second, the process of thinking about texts by contemporary philosophers increasingly focuses not in creating new ideas but in reformulating and re-discovering the applicability of the "Western canon." We need only turn the revival of using the Pauline Judeo-Christian tradition to rethink contemporary problems of subjectivity in the works of theorists, like Badiou, Žižek, Nancy, Butler, and Agamben, to see that the medieval tradition of using "sacred" authorities to understand the world has not gone out of style. Both post-modernity and our scholarly understanding of it have turned to environments very familiar to medieval thought, and yet medieval thought has been, for the most part, shut out from this conversation.

This exclusion has had less to do with scholarly unfamiliarity of medieval texts than with a short-coming in the understanding of how texts exert their authority upon readers. The post-modern understanding of authority revolves around what Michel Foucault calls an "author function," and it defines authorship not through a relationship to a particular author but as "a relationship of homogeneity, filiation, authentication of some texts by the use of others; a reciprocal explication, or concomitant utilization" that gives authority to a text based upon its cultural circulation amidst readers (381-82). In the medieval era, this idealization of authority through cultural reproduction seems completely out of place if only because readers could not so easily replicate or own uniform versions of works. Medieval texts, as the myth goes, were chained to monastery walls, and literacy was restricted to a select few. As a result, it seems difficult to use medieval to say something meaningful about the reproducibility of ideas in a "global village" in which ideas not only flow freely but may be easily adaptable by a variety of readers, who, in disseminating these texts, become authors.

The gulf between post-modern and medieval readers, due to the ease of contemporary reproducibility, also separates the post-modern and medieval author. After all, if not *just* anyone may read a text, then not *just* anyone may write one, let alone be considered an authority. If we reverse this assumption, which lies at the heart of Foucault's formulation of authority, then we can say that if a text is easily

disseminated, then so is its authority. And this is precisely the relationship which the following analysis will uncover in the fifteenth-century Iberian translations of John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*. I will argue that the poem's medieval readers managed to believe that reading could be a type of authority by thinking that the way by which this work was reproduced was a *sufficient* condition for its authority. John Gower's *Confessio* became the first English work to be translated very divergent vernacular traditions (traditions which would not incorporate another English work within at least a century after) because, like a post-modern text, it did not a) stake a claim in an authorial literary tradition or b) simply aim to transmit the author's message for use by readers. In other words, Gower's work impelled readers, by their very act of *replicating the text they read*, to also be called authors.

To flesh out this argument, I will look at the Iberian translations of the *Confessio*'s "The Tale of Nebuchadnezzar's Punishment," and show how these texts consistently followed not the message or imagined use of their author but a very subtle logic of reproducibility within Gower's *Confessio*. The translators understood that the agonistic and discordant dialogue between Gower's Latin commentary and his English poem needed to be preserved as a central aspect of the work's meaning *even without the physical presence of each component and even across languages*. Gower's Latin commentary gave the *Confessio* its ability to transcend a fixed idea of authority, and divested the persona of the writer –and of his avowed *auctoritas*– from the poem, making this very English work universally applicable and –like the Bible– endlessly malleable in the hands of its readers.

1.

At first, it appears counterintuitive to claim that the *Confessio* does not distinguish between the poem's "author function" and the reader's persona. From the poem's naming of John Gower in its initial gloss to its framing of the work as a confession of sins of love, both *who* the author is and *how* he presents a deeper truth to an audience appear as indelible concerns that structure an otherwise fragmentary collection of tales. Even the structure of the work, a series of moral exempla given from a confessor *Genius* to the penitent *Amans* to heal love's wounds, hints at a "deeper" guiding principle which shrouds the work in a quest for meaning. Winthrop Wetherbee (1991, 30) and A. J. Minnis (51) have described this dialogic relationship between *Genius* and *Amans* as proof of the work's obsession with a single vision of Boethian *auctoritas* –a dialectic whose thesis and anti-thesis makes a reader dependent upon the ever search for an ultimate meaning within the work. *Amans*' search for solutions to his love sickness, like that of Boethius in dialoguing with Lady Philosophy, may be endless, and at times up for debate; however, it still needs the authorial semblance of meaning which the reader provides in his quest of parsing through the work's complex dialogue.

Wetherbee and Minnis are not alone in describing the *Confessio* as a poem geared to make its readers mine an author's order out of madness. For many critics, the lack

of unity in the various exempla cannot be divorced from the intensity in which the *Confessio* pushes a reader further and further into accepting some type of authorial message (Fisher 134). In Peter Nicholson's words, the constant shadows of exemplary and moral value in the Latin gloss, which surrounds and explains the profane English tales, allow readers to distinguish "between the subject of the poem and broader moral and ethical concerns" that belie the work's deeper meaning (124). The *Confessio*'s discordant morals, thus, aim "not to distance readers from wisdom, but better to ensure their achieving it" by surrounding a vernacular poem with the Latinate voice of authority. The didacticism of the Latin structure then allows critics to argue that, unlike a work like Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the *Confessio* has both a completed and closed structure in which the shadow of *auctoritas* impels a determinate ethics of reading to seek out meaning (Olsson 14).

Indeed, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, with its incomplete open-ended journey, presents a direct contrast to the hidden rigidity maintained through the type of *compilatio* by which the *Confessio* frames its stories. *Compilatio*, or the medieval technique of compiling variegated tales in a type of moral treatise, arises from the tradition of medieval preaching, which uses the fictional, mythological, and even profane as means to involve audiences in the search for a deeper, spiritual truth (Rouse and Rouse 61-64). Following this tradition, Gower's *compilatio* of tales does not present a quarrel, like Chaucer's pilgrimage, but rather, it inhabits a single space, which only appears to create a "carnavalesque" atmosphere in the poem, but in reality, allows "neither [Gower] nor his themes to remain inviolate" to the reader's search for meaning (Watt 24). No Harry Bailly surprises the narrative by interrupting Genius's long-winded narratives; no drunken Miller parodies the Lover's complaint with drunken jokes. Unlike the *Tales*, Gower's *Confessio* is decidedly convivial, with its Latin frame hinting towards moral instruction and not towards the apparent moral disorder of Chaucer's *Tales*.

Yet, in taking the textual habitat of the *Confessio*'s *compilatio* as proof that a common authorial voice guides the poem's tales, the critical understanding of the *Confessio* grossly underestimates how the poem's Latin frame interacts with its meaning. For one, the *Confessio*'s use of *compilatio* does more than provide a schema for reading or a name to the poem's authoritative device. As it is first introduced by the poem's Latin gloss, the term is also poetically playful: it overtly undermines the encounter with *any* underlying principle of authorial filiation and prevents the conviviality of readerly interpretation and authorial themes:

Hic declarat in primis qualiter ob reuerenciam serenissimi principis domini sui [Regis Anglie Ricardi secundi] totus suus humilis Iohannes Gower, licet graui infirmitate a diu multipliciter fatigatus, huius opusculi labores suscipere non recusauit, sed tanquam fauum ex variis floribus recollectum, presentem libellum ex variis cronicis, historiis, poetarum

philosophorumque dictis, quatenus sibi infirmitas permisit, studiosissime *compilauit*.

Here in first place, he declares how, from reverence to the most noble prince his lord [Richard II, King of England], wholly humble John Gower, having been much fatigued for a long time under a dire sickness, did not recuse from undertaking the labors of this little work, but he zealously compiled in the manner of a honeycomb *collected* from various flowers, the present little book from various chronicles, histories, and sayings of the poets and philosophers, as much as his infirmity would permit. (Prologue 34-35. Latin marginalia)¹

This Latin gloss names its author John Gower as he who “*quatenus sibi infirmitas permisit, studiosissime compilauit*” ‘zealously compiled in as much as his infirmity would permit him’ the various stories contained in the *Confessio*. The poem’s naming gesture would seem to be sufficiently authorial following the schema of *compilatio*: it both tells the reader that there was no single originator of the stories contained in the narrative and also signs a particular author’s name as the tales’ humble manipulator. But this is only part of the story. Read as a direct explanation of what occurs in the poem, the gloss actually mocks the efforts of the author of the English stories. For even as this statement reflects Gower’s dedication for writing (because he works despite his own sickness), it also describes an old man, whose response to a royal request for a poem occurs in the height of infirmity. In short, the *Confessio* is nothing but the product of a sickly old man.

The very glue of Gower’s *auctoritas*, the idea of *compilatio*, thus prevents a deeper theme to delimit its meaning by characterizing the author’s task as infirmity itself. Although medieval writers commonly use *infirmitas* to give luster to their efforts by claiming that the least of their efforts compares to the work of giants, they usually couch the trope within a narrative game that leaves the attributes the better parts of the text to the writer and excuses its mistakes on the reader’s own ineptness. For example, Thomas Hoccleve characterizes his own work as an infirm compilation in his “*compleinte*” thus: “*Considereth, therof was I noon auctour./I nas in þat cas but a reportour/ Of folks tales. As they seid, I wroot./I nat affirmed it on hem, God woot*” (VII.2.760-763). Although Hoccleve claims infirmity, his infirmity –like that of other such “infirm” authors like Ranulf Higden, Geoffrey Chaucer, or Francis Petrarch– means to place his name alongside a higher literary tradition when the reader accepts that the writer is but a mere offshoot, a product, of the guiding principle that preceded him. Conversely, if in molding tradition, a reader takes issue with an author’s message, Hoccleve’s infirmity comes to his defense by allowing him to be only a

¹ All translations to the Latin glosses to the *Confessio* come from Andrew Galloway’s translations to the English edition of the work; all other translations are mine. All emphases in Italics are mine.

copyist and laying the responsibility for understanding the tales squarely on the shoulders of his sources and on the misinterpretations of his readers.

The *Confessio*'s use of *infirmitas* takes a totally different route in representing the work of its writer. Unlike Hoccleve's assertion of infirmity, the only time the trope occurs in the poem comes in the Latin frame which should be explicating the process of the poem's *compilatio* and making the poem palatable for learned readers. Because the Latin contains a subtle criticism of the author, it makes any search for a homogeneous theme impossible by simply following the conviviality of the *compilatio* of English tales. Instead, the juxtaposition of derision and yet interest for the work in the Latin frame of the poem makes Gower's English *Confessio* truly embody *infirmitas*. That is, the trope of *compilatio* which should provide a guiding principle for its tales only serves to confuse the readerly expectations of its authority.

In fact, the only evidence we have where readers turned to Gower's use of *compilatio* to understand his role as an author—a direct elision in naming Gower both as a *compilator* and *auctor*—proves the fundamental infirmity of the work. This elision strangely enough only occurs outside the poem's language of origin, in the colophon which precedes the table of contents to Juan de Cuenca's Castilian translation of Gower's work, the *Confesión del Amante*:

Este libro es llamado Confesión del amante, el qual compuso Joan Goer, natural del reino de Inglaterra, e fue tornado en lenguaje portugués por Ruberto Paym...E después sacado en lenguaje castellano por Joan de Cuenca...E declara primeramente en commo, por onra e reverencia del rey Ricardo Segundo, este *auctor* no rehusó el trabajo de aquesta obra, *puesto que* padeçiese en sí grande enfermedad. E, así commo el panar por las avejas de diversas flores es apañado, bien así *este mismo auctor de desvariadas estorias*, de corónicas e dichos de poetas e filósofos, con grande estudio compiló e fizo aqueste libro, en el prólogo del qual ay estos capitulos siguientes.

This book is called the Confession of the lover, which John Gower, native of England, composed, and which was changed into the Portuguese language by Robert Payn...And after, [it was] brought forth in the Castilian language by John of Cuenca...And it firstly declares how, through honor and reverence of the king Richard II, this *auctor* did not refuse the labor of this work, although he was suffering a great sickness of his own. And, just as the honeycomb is *gathered/covered* by bees from diverse flowers, in this way *this same auctor of diverse/disordered stories*, of chronicles and sayings of poets and of philosophers, with great zeal compiled and made this book, in the Prologue in which there are the following chapters. (141)

Cuenca's reading of the *Confessio*, most likely taking its lead from a missing Portuguese exemplar, clarifies two seemingly divergent strains of interpretation about the poem. First, despite his claim to *infirmitas*, Gower's Iberian readers describe him as an author; second, they describe his authority as *compilatio* and, as a result, as a task done in the shadow of infirmity.

Cuenca's preface does not say that Gower's authorship may be derived from the arrangement of Gower's stories and the repetition of the gesture of authority. Instead, he argues that the repeating of the tales itself has made Gower the "auctor de [estas] desvariadas estorias" 'author of [these] various/disordered stories' gathered "commo el panar por las avejas" 'as the honeycomb by the bees,' tying his source to the *florilegium* tradition associated with the careful reading of *compilatio* (Dionísio 19-21) as if it were the nature of authorship itself. Cuenca both presents Gower in the same level as the biblical, philosophical, and poetic authors he uses and yet still underlines his status as a careful *compiler* and reader of tales, like the industrious honey bee. Authority, in this formulation, means the ability to reproduce and *read* texts, and if the *compiler* Gower may be an author, then so is Cuenca, the translator, who, as Antonio Cortijo Ocaña has described him, created a translation from the Portuguese *ad pedem litterae* in contradistinction to the majority of pre-humanistic, medieval translations (2007, 86). As a result, the preface to the Castilian *Confesión* does something very unusual for a medieval translation: it not only names the English author "Joan Goer" and the Castilian translator Juan de Cuenca, but also the Portuguese translator from which Cuenca derives his work, Robert Payn.²

Medieval translators rarely credit any sources which would have aided in their translation since the naming of a source would be both an explicit acknowledgement of the source's authority and an implicit undermining of the translator's own aspirations to occupy the same place as the work he translated (Burnely 41). The most notorious example of this slight-of-hand, in Gower's time, is Chaucer's translation of Boethius's *Consolacione*, the *Boece*. Despite his claims, Chaucer does not translate Boethius only from the Latin proper; rather, he compiles several sources in creating his translation without crediting them: Jean de Meun, Nicholas Trevet, and Remegius. Chaucer avoids to cite these many signatures not because he seeks to erase his sources—after all most learned readers of Chaucer would have recognized the provenance—but because he wishes to incorporate a whole tradition of Boethian commentary into his literary persona (Machan 155-56). For the medieval translator, the citation is a gesture to authority and a direct way to differentiate between *auctoures* and their readers.

It is important to note that, despite what Bernardo Santano Moreno² has called a conservative tendency in the translators wish to "[sobrepasar] al propio John Gower" in preserving a moral intent (1990, 110), there is no evidence that Juan de Cuenca (or Robert Payn for that matter) has the type of literary aspirations in signing his translation and eliding his sources which led Chaucer to do the same. When Cuenca

² For the relationship and dating of Payn's translation to its Spanish translation and its influence on Portuguese literature see Santano Moreno 1991, 30.

references Payn and Gower in the same stroke, he erases any hierarchy between author and reader –between the English poet and his Iberian translators. Cuenca could have been silent about Payn; he could have credited another tradition of translation– for example, the lineage that surrounded the work of João Barroso, who also translated Gower’s work into Portuguese.³ And yet he chose to juxtapose these three signatures –Payn, Gower, and his own– without any pretense to their unique status as guarantors of the authorial message contained within the work.

2.

The Iberian translations of the *Confessio* show us a medieval world in which the difference between authors and readers vanishes and, consequently, a world in which to replicate a text is to have authority. And they did so, not because they were altering the intent of their author, but because they were following a logic inherent in Gower’s work. And in fact, the seemingly unified dissemination of the *Confessio*, despite its variant channels of scribal, aural, and even linguistic reproduction, would suggest that there was at least a recognizable principle of authority that transcended the mere reproduction of the work’s message (Parkes 120). To reproduce Gower’s poem across so many various channels and still recognize its writer as an author and not just a writer, readers must have found a value in the structure of the poem itself, in its use of signs independently from their ability to point towards a deeper meaning.

Perhaps one of the best places to understand how this distinction occurs in the *Confessio* is the “Tale of Nebuchadnezzar’s Madness.” For one, the figure of Nebuchadnezzar is a common metonym for the *Confessio*. *The Book of Daniel* –from which this tale originates– so frames Gower’s approach to writing in general that the colophon that ends most of the *Confessio*’s recensions refers to Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams as explicit structural frames to read the *Confessio*:

Tercius liber iste Anglico sermone in viii partes diuisus, qui ad instantiam serenissimi principis dicti domini Regis Anglie Ricardi secundi conficitur, secundum Danielis prophetiam super huius mundi regnorum mutatione a tempore Regis Nabugodonosor usque nunc tempora distinguit. Tractat eciam secundum Nectanabum et Aristotilem super hiis quibus Rex Alexander tam in sui regimen quam aliter eorum disciplina edoctus fuit. Principalis tamen huius libri materia super amorem et amantum condiciones fundamentum habet. Ubi variarum cronicarum historiarumque sentencie necnon Poetarum Philosophorumque scripturae ad exemplum distinctius inseruntur. Nomenque presentis opusculi Confessio Amantis specialiter intitatur.

³ The lone witness of the Portuguese translation of the *Confessio*, which has survived was written by Barroso, and has been published in parts: the Prologue to Book IV by Manuela Faccon, 2011 (which I will refer to); Book V to VIII by Antonio Cortijo Ocaña, along with Maria do Carmo Correia, as electronic versions in *eHumanista*.

By means of English speech divided in eight parts, this third book, which is fashioned at the request of the most famous prince the said lord Richard II King of England, distinguishes the times according to the prophecy of Daniel over the change of the kingdoms of the world from the time of King Nebuchadnezzar until now. Also following Nectanebus and Aristotle, it treats over those things by which King Alexander was taught the rule in his own as much as other disciplines of these. Nevertheless, the principal matter of this book has the foundation over love and the conditions to love. There the various chronicles, histories, and sentences of the poets and philosophers and scripture are grafted distinctly as exempla. And the name of the present small work is specifically entitled *Confessio Amantis*. (“The Colophons”)

According to the colophon, the *Confessio* counts both its narrative time (its eight-book division) and its historical time (the “mutacione” ‘change’ of the world) by means of “Anglico sermone” ‘English speech,’ so that, following the model of *Daniel*, the writing of the poem mimics the reader’s temporal being-in-the-world. Even more, the colophon describes Gower’s speech as temporal distinguishing it from the many exempla that “inseruntur distinctius” ‘are distinctly grafted’ in the work, suggesting a distinction between the *Confessio*’s style and its content.

That the stories of the *Confessio* are so unnaturally grafted into the work’s narrative structure may seem difficult to accept. First, the two models the colophon gives to think of Gower’s style (the *Book of Daniel* and the *Secretum Secretorum*) do not overtly describe how the poem’s structure may be distinguished from its moral message. Second, even if the colophon suggests that Gower uses these two, very different, Latinate stories to exemplify a narrative style, what should we then do with the rest of the poem’s 33,000 lines? How can we derive a single authorial schema of writing, without also relying on some sort of unifying thematic, from the variety of genres and tales bound in the work? Why would the explicative Latin apparatus to the *Confessio* set up some sort of unbridgeable dichotomy between its style and content? Why would this Latinate explication of the work’s logic not be simply, as Sîan Echard argues, an example of the disparate interpretations of Gower’s various readers (12)?

All this comes to say, that we cannot take anything that the *Confessio*’s Latin explicative frame says as lone proof of thematic and stylistic disassociation without also understanding how the poem was transmitted amidst its readers. As Derek Pearsall has suggested, the very need to have Latin colophons and commentary upon a text alone suggests that the poem’s readers sought to understand the author’s meaning by focusing on his language (24-25). So that, at least for Gower’s readers, the privileging of a particular metaphor or image within the *Confessio*’s Latin frame would show a poem tailored for the political and social needs of a particular culture

(Coleman 232-34; Lindeboom 344-45), making impossible any claim that the poem's style –and not its themes– impelled its translation outside England.

The poem's lack of an explicit authorial voice, consequently, would not embody the failure of signs to portray to some deeper authorial meaning but rather their very success at guiding a variety of audiences to search for that meaning. Simply pointing out the disjointedness in the poem would not prove the absence of the voice of authority but the presence of ever shifting readerly reception. In this way, Russell Peck argues that the *Confessio's* use of *Daniel* shows how Gower understood the “two essential features of [the poem's] moral rhetoric: first, the apocalyptic reminder that in keeping with God's well-designed plan, a plan announced in the writings of old, history has something to teach us...second, the psychological inference that by learning from history we can do something about our fallen situation through right use of our wits” (178). The *Confessio's* colophon, therefore, valorizes *Daniel* because the book exemplifies how an authorial message can make order out of chaos for our psychological state as particular readers. Further, *Daniel*, like many of the *Confessio's* moral exempla, proves that a poem's author understood the variety of his audiences and sought to discipline their interpretations.⁴

Yet if the metonym of Nebuchadnezzar is merely just one example of how Gower understood the need to ground readerly interpretations of some moral message through narrative style, then how would Gower's non-English audience and how would its Iberian readers Juan de Cuenca and Robert Payn read the *Confessio* as a single poem when the poem itself has such variance? What part of the text would have caused so many readers to focus on Nebuchadnezzar to such a degree that the image of the dreaming king became not only an indelible concern for the illuminations of the poem but also the main focus of the three other works which make up the majority of Gower's opus? If Nebuchadnezzar presents the marriage of style with authorial meaning in the *Confessio*, if it was just another story to portray the author's purpose, why was this story such an obsession for Gower and for his readers?

To understand the centrality of *The Book of Daniel* to a medieval reader of the *Confessio* we would need to focus in two places in the poem. The first would be found in the Prologue's depiction of *Daniel 2*, commonly described as Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the “Monster of Time; the second, in the “Tale of Nebuchadnezzar's Punishment.” Both of these dreams have direct interventions by the narrator in explaining their relevance to the poem as a whole and so represent important structural points in the narrative. However, only the second of these stories the “Tale of Nebuchadnezzar's Punishment” unifies the two episodes into a single metonymic narration that is explicitly separate from the rest of the poem:

Now herken a tale that is soth:
Thogh it be noght of loves kinde

⁴ For an example of how major scholars use Gower's “authorial voice” to resolve narrative ambiguities, see Peck 1994, 267; Yeager, 1987, 259-60; and Wetherbee, 1986, 260.

A gret ensample thou schalt finde
 This veine gloire for to fle
 Which is so full of vainté
 Ther was a king that mochel myhte
 Which Nabugodonor hihte
Of whom that I spake hier tofore
 Yit in the Bible his name is bore. (1.2773-2789)

This frame to the “Tale” repeats, almost to the letter, what the Latin colophon suggests: *Daniel* as a metonym represent a single temporal speech –which the narrator in strangely eliding with the person *Genius* has narrated in the “hier tofore”– outside the majority of the “kinde” stories that inhabit Gower’s work. It is precisely the explicit lack of conviviality of “The Tale of Nebuchadnezzar’s Punishment” with the rest of the *Confessio* that makes this second (and final) allusion to *Daniel*, a type of metonym for the poem’s style without the presence of an authorial message.

Even the first-person tone which Genius takes to begin this instructive aside to the lover does not gesture the reader to the writer of the *Confessio*, but to the very biblical narrative which it readapts: “ego Nabuchodonosor quietus eram in domo mea et florens in palatio meo” ‘I Nebuchadnezzar was quiet in my house and flourishing in my palace’ (Dan. 4:1).⁵ Unlike Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the passage of time which necessitates readerly interpretation through its cryptic prophecies and which impels Gower to transpose upon it his own creative interpretations (and expectations) of history, the biblical account of this second dream valorizes the personal, spoken speech of the author in such a degree that, according to Jerome’s gloss on the passage to his *Vulgata*, the biblical “ego” ‘I’ shows a literal (and perhaps dictated) epistle, “inserted in the volume of the prophet, in order that the book might not afterwards be thought to have been manufactured by some other author...but the product of Daniel himself” (46). And if, for Jerome and Gower, this dream presents a test-case for authority, then the straight-forward presentation of Gower’s version of the episode would seemingly support the idea that meaning and style are wedded through an authorial presence.

To be sure, this idea would have its origins in the biblical presentation of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream. In Jerome’s Latin, *Daniel 4* seems to unfold its narrative without much ambiguity and with a seemingly direct link between the tale and its message. Nebuchadnezzar dreams of a tree and hears a voice which declares that, for its pride, the tree will be hewn down and its “manly” heart replaced with a beastly soul. The voice declares that the punishment will continue until such a time in which this manly tree recognizes the power of the true God. Nebuchadnezzar awakes terrified, but manages to remember his dream and narrate it to his chief interpreter, Daniel. In contradistinction to other ambiguous interpretations of the king’s dreams, the Jewish prophet does not see this dream as mystery needing divine revelation but

⁵ All references to the Latin Bible come from Jerome’s *Vulgata*.

gives an immediate interpretation: if the king continues to be proud, he will be humbled and made to act like a beast. Expectedly, Nebuchadnezzar remains obdurate, and as a result, his humanly mind leaves him. He begins to eat grass like a beast; his hair grows like the feathers of an eagle, and his nails lengthen so that they look like claws. After seven years of punishment, Nebuchadnezzar's human mind returns; he recognizes his sin, seeks repentance, and regains his kingdom.

Strangely enough, the directness of the episode impels one of Jerome's longest glosses to *Daniel*. This gloss does not try, like many of his others, to clarify for his readers an obscure moral message or figural or prophetic interpretation, but quite the opposite: it warns the reader from reading too much into the biblical narrative. Consequently, Jerome is forced to take a strange position for one of the most prolific allegorists of the Old Testament; he is forced to argue against figural interpretation:

The narrative is clear indeed and requires but little interpretation. Because he displeased God, Nebuchadnezzar was turned into a madman...But there are some who claim to understand by the figure of Nebuchadnezzar the hostile power which the Lord speaks of in the Gospel, saying: "I beheld Satan falling from heaven like lightning."...These authorities assert that it was absolutely impossible for a man who was reared in luxury to subsist on hay for seven years and to dwell among wild beasts for seven years without being at all mangled by them. Also they ask how the imperial authority could have been kept waiting for a mere madman, and how so mighty a kingdom could have gone without a king for so long a period...And so they pose all of these questions and offer as their own reply the proposition that since the episode does not stand up as genuine history, the figure of Nebuchadnezzar represents the devil. To this position we make not the slightest concession; otherwise everything we read in Scripture may appear to be imperfect representations and mere fables. For once men have lost their reason, who would not perceive them to lead their existence like brutish animals in the open fields and forest regions? And to pass over all other considerations, since Greek and Roman history offer episodes far more incredible, such as Scylla and the Chimaera, the Hydra and the Centaurs, and the birds and wild beasts and flowers and trees, the stars and the stones into which men are related to have been transformed, what is so remarkable about the execution of such a divine judgment as this for the manifestation of God's power and the humbling of the pride of kings? (46)

In an almost comical paradox, Jerome uses a lengthy gloss to chastise the lengthy, allegorical glosses of biblical commentators. Jerome argues that, if everything in the Bible which is unbelievable is to be explained as a moral allegory by authorities, then

all biblical truths risk being discarded as imperfect fables without a semblance of truth.

Jerome's reasoning, in effect, predates what Paul de Man in reading Walter Benjamin would describe as the fundamental nature of allegory –that hermeneutics do not point a reader to a singular meaning but towards an endless play of figural divergences. If everything can be interpreted, then there is no such thing as a literal meaning. Jerome knows this, and he knows that in his own lengthy gloss upon lengthy allegorical glosses, he risks perpetuating the very practices he criticizes. After all, his defense of literality depends on the very fables he fears. Jerome argues that if unexplainable transformations occur so much in the histories and fictional fables of Romans and Greeks, a king's mere change into madness and survival in the wilderness –even if it sounds outside the realm of logical plausibility– should not be grounds to allegorize a narrative and so divest it of authenticity. Because readers can suspend their belief in reality when reading pagan fables, there is no reason to turn to allegorical interpretations when encountering the marvelous suspension of reality in the Bible. Doing so risks draining the authenticity and authority of the divine truth. This is a message and warning against pride made all the more authorial by the surety of the “ego Nabuchodonosor” that starts the narrative.

How can we understand this paradox? What drives Jerome to state that authenticity and the role of the author inhabit even marvelous narratives? If a reader's knowledge of a text's authenticity may be suspended without altering the facticity of the narrative, what separates fiction and reality? What distinguishes the fixity of truth from the play of allegory? In essence, we need to understand how Jerome thinks of that truth may be represented, and this answer comes to us in one of the last glosses of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the “Monster of Time”:

Let us not marvel, therefore, whenever we see kings and empires succeed one another, for it is by the will of God that they are governed, altered, and terminated. And the cases of individuals are well known to Him who founded all things. He often permits wicked kings to arise in order that they may in their wickedness punish the wicked. At the same time by indirect suggestion and general discussion he [Daniel] prepares the reader for the fact that the dream Nebuchadnezzar saw was concerned with the change and succession of empires. (27)

To make sense of Nebuchadnezzar's vision of the world Jerome does just what the Latin colophon to the *Confessio* describes as the poem's style: he understands lived time as God's writing. To Jerome, *historia* is not just a succession of events but the play of signs and figures written by a divine author. Consequently, from the vantage point of we, who simultaneously behave as readers of God's work and as players in it, *the direct representation of truth is always a type of marvelous and miraculous impossibility*. Because we are imbedded into God's temporal history like characters on

a play, our understanding of his truth is endlessly deferred. However, if such a divine truth does manifest itself to us, it would do so through a type of miracle which we should not wonder as surreal but understand as providential. Just as a writer prepares a reader for his message using literary devices, like foreshadowing and symbolism, so does God prepare us to encounter the final truth of the *historia* which he is writing through marvelous intrusions to our normal understanding of Providence.

Jerome claims that speech can represent truth directly only when it represents a miracle –when it represents a truth that cannot be embodied by anything in the temporal flow without God’s atemporal intervention. Thus, Jerome logically argues that the lack of plausibility of Nebuchadnezzar’s narrative, because of its atemporal provenance, is decidedly a form of truth, and pagan histories, which require temporal interpretation to be understood, are not. For Jerome, speech represents truth *only* when this truth is a timeless miracle because *only as a miracle*, in its immediacy and forceful removal from the temporal understanding of the reader, could texts present a *single, homogeneous meaning*. Jerome’s position, therefore, appears to be another way of saying what Gower had also stated in closing his own depiction of Nebuchadnezzar’s dream of the “Monster of Time” in the *Confessio*: “Cristes word may noght be fable” (Prologue 864). Because truth must be truth for *all possible readers at all times*, it cannot be fully understood by anyone *particular, temporal reader* without being misrepresented and so being fictional.

If Gower, therefore, means to affirm that his poem can present authorial, timeless truths to temporal readers, he would present Nebuchadnezzar’s madness in tandem to Jerome’s position. We would expect that Nebuchadnezzar’s madness be instructive in presenting a timeless truth –and so we would expect a transliteration, a compilation, of this direct biblical narrative. And to some extent, we get just that, save for one detail. Gower’s Nebuchadnezzar does not just act *like* a wild beast as a direct result of his pride, but he transforms into one:

And thus was he from his kingdom
 Into the wilde forest drawe,
 Wher that the myhti Goddes lawe
 Thurgh His pouer dede him transforme
 From man into bestes forme.
 And lich an oxe under the fot
 He graseth, as he nedes mot,
 To geten him his lives fode. (1.2968-2976)

Instead of describing Nebuchadnezzar’s change through the Middle English “transmuwe,” a cognate to Jerome’s use of “mutare” which could imply a simple change, Gower uses the more Ovidean-charged “transforme” (Yeager 1990, 115-18). Gower’s slight deviation from Jerome’s narrative has profound consequences:

Nebuchadnezzar literally turns into an ox, and his strange transformation directly turns the biblical narrative into the type of Ovidian fable which Jerome fears.

The change is more than stylistic. By subtly focusing on the physicality of Nebuchadnezzar's change, the *Confessio* turns a direct moral warning against pride into a playful Ovidian parody of contrition:

And so thenkende he gan doun bowe,
 And thogh him lacke vois and speche,
 He gan up with his feet areche,
 And wailende in his bestly stevene
 He kneleth in his wise and braieth
 To seche merci and assaieth
 His God, which made him nothing strange,
 Whan that he sih his pride change. (1.3022-3030)

In the *Confessio*, Nebuchadnezzar turns to heaven not to show remorse but because, as a beast, he can only pray by raising himself up “with his feet areche.” Instead of raising his hands up to pray, Nebuchadnezzar must raise his feet up to bray. His efforts do not produce commiseration from a forgiving deity, but show a reluctant God, whose hand “made [Nebuchadnezzar] nothing strange,” now condescending to “not making strange” ‘not turning askance from’ the king which he *strangely* turned into a braying ox.

That Gower's narrative hyperbolizes the strange occurrence to the point of parody, therefore, risks the same thing as the endless use of interpretations to a text: it risks turning all authority into a mere play of images. As Jerome explains, if Nebuchadnezzar's shape changes to that of a beast, the moral miracle and divine message of his contrition becomes lost: “had [Nebuchadnezzar] not raised his eyes towards heaven, he would not have regained his former intelligence. Moreover, when [Daniel] says that his intelligence returned to him, he shows that [Nebuchadnezzar] had lost not his outward appearance but only his mind” (53). Jerome's gloss highlights the danger of mistaking miracles for fiction. In fiction, a man would be changed into a beast, and the moral would have to be drawn by a *particular* reader from how he thinks an author intends to portray at one specific time. In a biblical miracle, Nebuchadnezzar's repentance proves that God granted salvation to a sinner in a miraculous (yet understandable) manner, so that, even though the miraculous event is witnessed by the reader, the actual reason for repentance would not be subject to interpretation since it is beyond *any particular* reader's power of comprehension and subject only to the inscrutable divine mind.

From this perspective, Gower's use of *The Book of Daniel*, unlike what most scholarship has argued, is not the poet's way of negotiating a deeper authorial message into the multiplicity of readerly interpretations. Instead the link, which Winthrop Wetherbee has seen between Ovid's representation of Io and Nebuchadnezzar's

punishment (1986, 257-58), suggests that authority vanishes in the play of signs –even those signs which have plain meanings. Gower’s emphasis on Nebuchadnezzar’s physical change exemplifies how even a simple change on emphasis causes a hermeneutic uncertainty that prevents readers from seeking a delimiting principle of authority. In direct response to the tradition of commentary following Jerome, Gower conceives of language as always necessitating interpretations and so as always allowing “Cristes truth” to be fabled and be the source of endless questions, complications, and further commentary regardless of its divine purpose. Just as writing can prevent any one single authority from closing a narrative’s meaning, writing also allows *all* interpretations to be authorial even in “straight-forward” narratives of morality.

3.

For Jerome, God’s authority is depicted through written truth –deferred from temporal speech and made to inhabit a universal system of signs for the benefit of all believers but inaccessible to any one of them, save through divine manifestation. For Gower, God’s truth cannot be deferred into any system of signs at all because, at any single point, the different readings that *all* believers bring to a text could compromise it. Consequently, if the *Confessio* has a moral end, it does not fashion an author’s message to account for the ethical multiplicity of readerly interpretations as J. Allan Mitchell recently suggests (14-15), nor does the *Confessio* simply become a trace of the praxis of reading John Dagenais has argued about the manuscripts of the *Libro de Buen Amor* (59-60). Instead, the *Confessio* highlights the separation of style to meaning to make meaning untranslatable (and hence unable to be perverted) by reading.

Paradoxically, it is this separation of reading from meaning –this type of endless semiological play on behalf of the reader without recourse to a singular principle of authorial filiation– that allowed the poem to be translated across different languages because Gower’s readers, particularly those in Iberia, could replicate the narrative as if they themselves were its authors. We can see this in the changes they made to the “Tale of Nebuchadnezzar’s Punishment.” As if heeding Jerome’s warning against reading Nebuchadnezzar’s change as literal –the Portuguese translation of the “Tale” in *Do Amante* presents Gower’s story as a straight-forward warning against the pride:

Ora filho eu te hej mostrado em este enxemplo o mal que uem ao que he mal acostumado per ssoberva contra a lei de deus, ao qual nehũu pode seer parçeiro. Porem para bem mentes ao rregimiento de ty medes que nom seias feito semelhante aa besta.

Now son, I have shown you in this example the evil that comes to those who have badly been accustomed, through pride which no one should

partake, against God's law. Because of this, pay close attention to your own regiment so that you would not be made similar to a beast. (326)

The English has Genius playfully presents a more ambiguous moral by suggesting that Nebuchadnezzar's transformation was physical and that therefore Amans should either not act prideful or behave like an ox: "Forthi, my sone, tak good hiede/So for to lede thi manhiede,/That thou ne be nocht lich a beste" 'For this my son, listen well so to lead your manhood/self that *you do not [act or become] like a beast*' (1.3044-3045). However, because in the Iberian translation Nebuchadnezzar did not actually change into an ox, with the Iberian translators eschewing the more generic "como," 'like' or 'as,' to translate the Middle English "lich" for the more definite "semelhante" 'similar,' Genius's moral upholds a definite message within the story.

Choosing the Portuguese "semelhante" for the Middle English "lich" may seem arbitrary (and perhaps simply synonymous) until we compare the Portuguese to Jerome's Latin description of Nebuchadnezzar's change:

Eadem hora sermo completus est super Nabuchodonosor, et ex hominibus abiectus est, et foenum *ut* bos comedit, et rore caeli corpus eius infectum est: donec capilli eius in *similitudinem* aquilarum crescerent, et ungues eius quasi avium.

In that same time, the speech was fulfilled over Nebuchadnezzar, and he was thrown from men, and *as* an ox he ate grass hay, and with the dew of heaven was dyed: until his hairs grew in *similitude* of the eagles, and his nails *as if they were* of birds. (Dan. 4:30)

Jerome's translation of the episode goes to extra pains to insert indirect speech and comparison to back up his claim that Nebuchadnezzar did not really transform from human into a beast, but that his human actions were wild and unkempt *in similitudinem* to those of a beast (53).

Further, the subtle word choice from "lich" to "semelhante" does more than repeat the biblical diction; it also reverberates across the entire Portuguese presentation of the episode, which so does away with all of the ambiguities introduced by Nebuchadnezzar's Ovidian transformation that there is no longer a danger to missing the moral truth of this narrative by focusing on its fable-like qualities. Instead of relating a braying ox in full repentance, the Portuguese *Do Amante* translates the episode this way:

E pensando esto cahiu em chão e pero que lhe mingou a falla, alçou as mãos ao alto em sua bestial maneira e fez seu planto ataa os çeeos. E em su oraçom devotamente demandava senpre merçee ficando em giolhos o melhor que podia.

And thinking this, [the king] fell on the ground, and although speech failed him, he raised his hands above in his beastly form/ability, and he made his plaint/cry towards the heavens, and in his prayer, he devoutly asked always mercy supporting himself in his knees, kneeling down as best he could. (325)

Here, because the Portuguese “*semelhança*” ‘similitude’ emphasizes similarity and not congruence, there is no juxtaposition of the image of a repenting ox and a repenting king, and Nebuchadnezzar’s contrition is depicted as decidedly human and not beast-like. The result is that, just as God punishes Nebuchadnezzar in the *Confessio*, the Portuguese translation has morphed “The Tale of Nebuchadnezzar’s Punishment” into an entirely different being: from a parody of moral fables into a direct presentation of morality. Nebuchadnezzar does not repent by loudly “*wailende*” ‘wailing’ in his beastly voice. Rather very politely, in the best of his “*bestial maneira*” ‘beastly ability,’ he raises his “*mãos*” ‘hands’ and not clawed feet while he offers “*su oraçom*” ‘his prayer’ and “*seu planto*” ‘his complaint’ to heaven.

And yet, the Portuguese, perhaps in a Jerome-inspired parody of its English original, retains a trace of the fantastic images of Gower’s story through the logical inconsistencies it introduces in its translation. For example, the Portuguese translates the English “*he gan doun bowe,/And thogh him lacke vois and speche*” ‘he began to bow/although he lacked voice and speech’ as “*cahiu em chãao pero que lhe minguo a falla, alçou as mãos*” ‘he fell on the ground *although* he lacked speech, he raised his hands.’ By introducing contrast of kneeling and voice, the English original shows an implied cause and effect. The king is a beast, and, being unable to speak, he must raise his hands to show an outward confession of contrition. In the Portuguese, a reader is simply left to wonder why the king lacks speech and what his silence has to do with his difficulty in kneeling. Even the very description of Nebuchadnezzar’s contrition as having a “*bestial maneira*” ‘beastly manner/shape’ leaves the traces of the Gowerian parody in a story that works as a definite moral allegory.

This still begs the question: why did the Iberian translations to the *Confessio* erase Gower’s original take on the narrative if their goal was to preserve his style of authority and not the content of his writing? Most critics assume that when the Portuguese translation does not have “*verbo pro verbum*” ‘word for word’ approach to translating its source, it falls back in a “*sensum pro sensum*” ‘sense for sense’ representation of the matter of the poem, which is then modulated to match the cultural expectations of its readers (Facon 77). Yet why bother awkwardly portraying Nebuchadnezzar as acting like a beast rather than just summarizing the narrative (or just excising it) entirely if the point of the Iberian translators was, as Santano Moreno has theorized, to omit possibly offensive points (1990, 97-98). Why so much faithfulness to a text that was significantly amended from its source? The answer is deceptively simple: the Portuguese translators took such liberties neither out of

idiosyncratic choices to placate the sensibilities of their audiences nor out of a desire to replicate some authorial meaning but because they followed the reproductive logic within the *Confessio* itself –a logic which asked them to discipline the *Confessio*'s exempla. Their vindication of the biblical hermeneutic tradition which the English *Confessio* seeks to parody was, therefore, a direct result of Gower's dichotomous narrative strategy and not a preservation of some moral meaning.

The question, therefore, is not why did the Iberian translators deviate from the author's intention, but why did they deviate from the meaning of the text? After all, not only did the Portuguese translators violently edit the *Confessio*'s text as if to discipline its content, but by retaining inconsistencies in the narrative, they also *show* that they had altered the original for a particular purpose. Thus, as Antonio Cortijo Ocaña has made clear, both Portuguese and Castilian translations stand so close together in relationship towards the English original that it repeats the Portuguese's interpretation of its source without caring to fix its syntactic differences from the original (2007, 87). In other words, the logical and narrative inconsistencies in the Iberian translation of the "Tale" stand as an obvious re-adaptation of its original.

If it should be translucently preserving any meaning, the Portuguese appears to focus on reproducing the biblical and not the Gowerian version of events. I quote the *Vulgata*, the English *Confessio*, and Portuguese *Do Amante* together:

Vulgata:

Cumque sermo adhuc esset in ore regis, vox de caelo ruit: Tibi dicitur Nabuchodonosor rex: Regnum tuum *transibit* a te, et ab hominibus eicient te, et cum bestiis et feris erit habitatio tua: *foenum quasi bos comedes*, et septem tempora mutabuntur super te, donec scias quod dominetur Excelsus in regno hominum, et cuicumque voluerit, det illud.

While speech was still in the mouth of the king, a voice from heaven came down: To you it was said Nebuchadnezzar king: the rule will be taken from you, and from men, they will throw you, and with the beasts and wild things will be your habitation: *you will eat hay as if you were an ox*, and seven ages will change over you, until you know that the Highest rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever he wishes. (Dan. 4:28-29)

Confessio:

Into the wilde forest drawe,
Wher that the myhti Goddes lawe
Thurgh His pouer dede him *transforme*
From man into bestes forme.

*And lich an oxe under the fot
He graseth, as he nedes mot,
To geten him his lives fode.*

He was drawn into the wild forest
Where the strength of God's law
Through his power *transformed* him
From man into the shape of a beast.
*And like an ox on foot,
He pastured, as he must,
To get his livelihood. (1.2970-2975)*

Do Amante:

*E fezeo poer em hũa fruestra brava onde foi *trasmudado* de homem em
semelhança de boi. Que so os pees andava paçando as hervas como
aquelle que em outra guisa nom achava mantiimento.*

And he was made with power to be drawn He ordered him to be thrown
into a wild forest where he was *transmuted* from man into the
similitude/appearance of an ox. So that on his feet he stood eating grass
like *someone which in no other way could be nourished. (325)*

In the Portuguese, there is no ox that eats as he must. Rather, there is only a prideful man reduced to walk a forest in a deranged state eating grass as if he could eat no other thing. These three lines decidedly direct the diction of the Portuguese text away from the meaning expressed by the English tale by removing the imagistic qualities of the original. By translating “beste” ‘beast’ as “boi” ‘ox,’ the Portuguese specifies, ahead of time, what type of “beste” Nebuchadnezzar will act like although the English takes over ten lines to make this clear, and so it removes any further need to elaborate upon an image. Further, whereas the English clarifies that the king is eating grass, “as he nedes mot” ‘as he must need’ because he is an ox, the Portuguese claims –alongside Jerome’s *Vulgate*– that Nebuchadnezzar eats grass as madman “que em outra guisa” ‘who in no other way’ could think to feed himself.

Still, these changes alone do not explain either a) why the Portuguese read the *Confessio* as a repetition of Jerome’s take on the tale –following the *Confessio*’s advice no less– nor b) why the translators’ choice of words mean to display that this text is just a translation and not a faithful reproduction of some original. The decisive choice of words here is the choice of “trasmudado” ‘transmuted/ trans-moved’ for the English “transformed” and its close similarity in meaning but not in appearance to the *Vulgata*’s “transibit” ‘trans-go.’ If the Portuguese translators strictly wished to communicate the meaning of change found in the Bible and not the more Ovidean

echo of physical transformation in their everyday vernacular, they could have simply used the more colloquial “mudar” ‘to change/to move’ as they do elsewhere in Book 1 to convey a slight change in appearance but not in being.⁶ Or if they wished to respect the meaning of the English original, they could have transliterated Gower’s “transforme” without attention to its literary implications, as they do in the other translations of Gower’s Ovidean exempla.⁷

If “transmudar” does not translucently rein Gower back to orthodoxy nor keep his original meaning, why use such a word? “Transmudar,” in fact, introduces more moral problems than it solves because it shows the awkwardness of the Portuguese translation by not only managing to keep the moral sense of the biblical exemplum intact but also retaining Gower’s “weird” interpretation of Nebuchadnezzar’s transformation. As I suggested, we should not attribute the choice to the translators but rather to the structure of the *Confessio* itself, which indeed suggested “transmudar” not from the moral *meaning* of the English poem but from the disjunctive *style* of the Latin gloss that surrounds the tale:

Hic ponit Confessor exemplum contra vicium inanis glorie, narrans qualiter Nabugodonosor Rex Caldeorum, cum ipse in omni sue maiestatis gloria celsior extitisset, *deus eius superbiam castigare volens ipsum extra formam hominis in bestiam fenum comedentem transmudavit*. Et sic per septennium penitens, cum ipse potenciosem se agnouit, misertus deus ipsum in sui regni solium retituta sanitate emendatum graciosius collocavit.

Here the Confessor presents an example against the vice of vain glory, relating how Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Chaldeans, when he himself was established very high in all the glory of his majesty, *God, wishing to chastise his pride, transmuted him into a grass-eating beast*. And thus making penance for seven years, when this one acknowledge him to be more powerful, God took pity and graciously placed him again on the soil

⁶ This is in fact how the idea of change is set up in the frame preceding the “Tale of Nebuchadnezzar’s Punishment” which compares the proud man to a chameleon who “anon his olde guise *change*” for new things (1.2696). The Portuguese reads, “*mudar sua guisa velha*” ‘change his old guise’ (Facon 434).

⁷ For example in the “Tale of Tiresias and the Snakes” where Tiresias is physically transformed into a snake: “And for he hath destourbed kind/And was so to nature unkind/Unkindeliche he was *transformed*,/That he which erst a man was formed/ Into a womman was forschape” (3.373-377). The Portuguese reads, “E, por que elle quis seer tam desnatural en querer storvar naturalleza, desnaturalmente foi por ello *transformado* en tal guisa que, onde for a formado homem, foi logomudado em molher” ‘And because he was so unnatural in wishing to hinder nature, he was unnaturally *transformed* in such a way that what was shaped man, was then changed into woman’ (Facon 590).

of his kingdom, freed from blemish and with his health restored.
(1.2788.Latin Marginalia)

We can explain the provenance of “transmudar,” in the Portuguese rendering of the episode, only if we think that the Portuguese translators were doing more than translating the *Confessio* as an English author’s work or disciplining it for their audience’s tastes. For “transmudar” to make sense as a possible translation for “transforme,” Gower’s translators had to turn to the poem’s Latin apparatus and assume that its reading of the poem was just as valid as the original and had to be preserved, even synthesized, into the poem. Therefore, the translators would see the poem not as a creation of an author but as the work of a reader.

This explains why neither the Portuguese nor the Spanish translations of the *Confessio* reproduce a full copy of the prose Latin frame much less of the Latinate verses that accompany the poem and why, more often than not, their translations seem to tame down Gower. The Iberian translators did not think that the Latin frame was another way to access the poem’s meaning; rather, they thought that the Latin frame of the poem was part of the poem itself—and since the Latin frame, most of the time, disciplines the English text, the translators also *appear* to focus on the moral and not the more “extra-moral” aspects of the work.

In the “Tale,” that the Latin frame structures the Portuguese approach to the “Tale” cannot be doubted. For one, this explains why the translators read the word “boi” ‘ox’ every time the English describes Nebuchadnezzar’s bestial change and not as some amorphous being. The *Confessio*’s Latin frame—taking its cue from only one part of Jerome’s narration—specifies the type of “bestiam” ‘beast’ which Nebuchadnezzar is: one which eats grass. Further, the Latin gloss but not the English poem (nor even the biblical story) makes the idea of God’s law central as a moral interpretation of the narrative “deus eius superbiam castigare volens” ‘God willing to punish/mend his pride,’ and so it makes sense that the idea of law frames the narrative at its end and not during its exposition when Nebuchadnezzar transforms into a beast. The Latin disambiguates how Nebuchadnezzar’s sin is against God’s law, and does not, like the English, suggest that God’s law is the cause for Nebuchadnezzar’s monstrous change.

I am not arguing that the Iberian readers of the *Confessio* followed a version of the phenomena described by Jesús Rodríguez Velasco in which the gloss has as much authority as the text itself and seeks to replace the original (123). If this was the case, *Do Amante* would reproduce both the English text and the Latin gloss without attempting to synthesize one into the other so seamlessly. The translators took the Latin gloss as a separate interpretation of an English work, but because they did not privilege the writing of the text over its reading (because they understood Gower’s work as a type of authorial *compilation*), they actively incorporated the Latin into the English poem they were encountering. Thus, they read “transmutavit” both as “transmudado” ‘transmuted’ (following the English) and as ‘trans-moved’ (following the Latin), and in their reproduction of the tale, Nebuchadnezzar’s mind does not *move*

to act like a beast (as Jerome's commentary assumes), nor is his body transformed into an ox's shape (as Gower describes in his English poem). Rather, following the Latin gloss, Nebuchadnezzar's mind was moved from one place to another and so Gower's over-the-top repentance describes not an outer state but an inner form of contrition. Translating "semehalça" for "lich," therefore is *not* a way of disciplining Gower, but rather a way to further the importance of the Latin gloss which reads him and describes his change as one of "formam" and "similitudinem."

Gower's Iberian translators did more than simply communicate English author's work into Portuguese or Spanish: they replicated an ethics of reading from the Latin frame of the poem, changing their text accordingly to reflect what they saw as an authoritative interpretation of Gower's text. This implies that the Portuguese translators thought that Gower's English text was not simply a vernacular translation of various stories. For them, the *Confessio* was the type of text that –like the Bible, Gratian's *Decretals*, and Dante's poetry– had to be read with close attention to its gloss and whose authority could not be translated simply by attention to its meaning because what mattered in translation was not the preservation of the original but the preservation of its act of reading as authorial.

The Iberian translations of the *Confessio* teach us that the practices of readers, this "world of medieval reading" which John Dagenais sees as a distinct from the medieval text (60; 73-74), were also the practices of authors. We can surmise that Gower's text circulated with authority in its own right, at least in Iberia, because to some extent it could portray writing (and reading) as more than the presentation of an author's ideas but as the act of authority itself. This is why the Portuguese translators use the *Confessio*'s Latin frame but do not explicitly translate it. Their translation shows that the authority of a work is not derived from its meaning or relationship to a tradition but to its ability to be reproduced, and so their work portrays the *Confessio*'s Latin frame only in so far as it confirms the logic present in Gower's English –a textual logic that does not simply wish to narrate "authorial" truth from some abstract meaning but which also seeks to imbue the process of narrative reproducibility with the authority of utterance itself.

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