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## Preface

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### **Acknowledgments**

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We want to thank our readers for an enthusiastic reception of the first issue of *Accessus: A Journal of Premodern Literature and New Media*. With the positive commentary of nearly instantaneous online reviews and several hundred downloads over the course of the past few months, it appears that *Accessus* has begun to cultivate an appreciative and fully engaged audience.<sup>1</sup> While in the inaugural issue we featured essays by authors whose papers were presented at conference sessions (at ICMS in Kalamazoo and MLA in Boston) organized and supported by The Gower Project, in this issue we explore non-conference submissions and the effects of an online platform on scholarship focused primarily on Western European literature prior to 1660. Here, in a form wherein length and bulk are no object and hyperlinks offer immediate pathways to multimedia presentations, we offer two exemplary essays addressing literary works of the fourteenth century: Robert J. Meindl's translation and commentary on Book VI of the *Vox Clamantis* with hyperlinks to source texts, and Linda Marie Zaerr's retrospective on the performative aspects of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* linked to relevant YouTube video clips and sound recordings. While each study constitutes an original, one-of-a-kind contribution to our understanding of these literary works and the cultures that produced them, taken together they demonstrate, in their integration of supplementary sources and new media exempla, the advantages of hypertext publication.

Robert J. Meindl's "*Semper Venalis: Gower's Avaricious Lawyers*" provides a new, poetic translation and an extensive commentary on the first three chapters of the *Vox Clamantis*,

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1. <http://burnablebooks.com/> and <http://modernmedieval.blogspot.com/2013/12/briefly-noted-accessus-journal-of.html> offer encouraging commentaries. Quantitative information on the number of downloads is reported on a monthly basis by Digital Commons.

Book VI. “[T]he primary obstacle to the study of the *Vox clamantis* beyond its first book is the lack of a reliable and readable English verse translation to accompany close investigation of its Latin text,” Meindl comments, and by providing a graceful rendering of passages from Book VI, “*Semper Venalis*” will both draw new readers to Gower’s major Latin poem and make further study of Gower’s views on the justice system possible. Through its commentary on *Vox* VI. 1–3, “*Semper Venalis*” represents a contemporary form of *accessus*, one opportunity to which we point in this e-journal’s title. Though the e-journal’s title also alludes to a democratic access to the latest scholarship via the web and to the maintenance of copyright by our authors (who retain access to their own work), Meindl’s writing takes us back to the medieval *accessus ad auctores*, introductions to the texts of famous authors. Just as the *accessus* adapted throughout the centuries, the thirteenth century, reflecting the new Aristotelianism by developing the four causes in any text, for instance, Meindl’s commentary deploys a variety of current conventions, including translations that follow original passages and footnotes hyperlinked to primary sources (Gratian’s *Decretum* and Thomas Aquinas’s *Summa Theologiae*), in order to explain anew Gower’s characterization of lawyers in the compendious *Vox*.

Linda Marie Zaerr’s “How the Axe Falls: A Retrospective on Thirty-five Years of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* Performance,” shifts the focus from Gower’s *Vox* to the voice (and vocalization) of the Gawain-poet in a “new approach to using historical performance as a tool for understanding medieval narrative performance.” Zaerr’s retrospective account of performing this and other Middle English romances reminds us how a written text, contained within the pages of a unique manuscript, may be reanimated and transposed to a modern audience. Zaerr’s decision to juxtapose “eight performances of a single passage” of one of *SGGK*’s most memorable moments—the beheading scene—foregrounds the interpretive

challenges to performers of Middle English poetry. Gestures, vocal inflections, facial expressions, instrument choices, props, considerations of costume and setting, as well as the attention paid to the myriad details that performance demands “transform a text” into an engaging and dynamic narration. Zaerr encourages a twenty-first-century audience to adjust its ears to the sonorities of authentic medieval instruments and to experience the poem visually, aurally, rhythmically, sensually. And while it is the case that “historical performance cannot recreate medieval entertainment” as precisely as we might desire, dramatic and dramatically musical reenactments “can provide valuable clues to what that entertainment might have been like.”

Our hope is that these essays offer yet another set of possibilities enabled by *Accessus*'s ability to accommodate different formats, create stimulating hypertextual environments, and at the same time deliver substantive and rewarding content. *Accessus* continues to embrace updated technologies designed to translate diverse scholarly works into a virtual world available to all interested scholars and students. We look forward to publishing innovative ideas in ways that challenge traditional modes of thinking and expand our purview of the correspondences between literatures and disciplines that contribute to the shaping of our future. Conference sessions recently organized and sponsored by The Gower Project promise to do just that: \*Gower and Science\* at ICMS in Kalamazoo, \*Gower and Medicine\* and a \*Gower Project Report\* at the Third International Congress of the John Gower Society, and a jointly delivered paper (Donavin and Salisbury) on Chicago, Newberry Library MS 33.5 at the New Chaucer Society Conference in Reykjavik, Iceland. The details of these and other initiatives are available at <http://www.gowerproject.org/> under NEWS.

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