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"For it Acordeth Noght to Kinde": Remediating Gower's Confessio Amantis in Machinima

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"For it Acordeth Noght to Kinde": Remediating Gower's *Confessio Amantis* in Machinima

Sarah L. Higley

I cannot stretch up to the heavens my hand
or set aright this world, which is always in balance.

Vimeo https://vimeo.com/98521054   or:
YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FcliUQvo_cY&list=UUd_irf-08NAMyz8m37QXVSA

Introduction

The "medieval film" is a phrase often heard across academia, and it has double meaning for me.

It primarily refers, of course, to film forms of "neomedievalism," or cinematic remediation of

medieval subject matter and literature. However, I hear in it, too, a film *made* in the Middle

Ages, if that were possible, most resonantly in the title of the 2014 anthology *The Medieval

Motion Picture*,[1] as though illuminators were somehow bringing their illustrations to life within

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1. *The Medieval Motion Picture: The Politics of Adaptation*, ed. Andrew James Johnson,
Margitta Rouse, and Philipp Hinz (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

their frames (especially those Anglo-Saxon monsters extruding beyond them), or making dancing puppets cast their shadows in Plato's cave. In a way, that is what machinima does as this essay will show: throw a digital shadow of a representation on an artificial wall. Whether it throws a shadow of the medieval world on the wall is much more complicated. The contributions to *The Medieval Motion Picture* are united in their exploration of the uses of "temporality" in these films as they "enter into a dialogic relationship to the Middle Ages rather than simply appropriating objects of the past."[2] How do we negotiate that gap in time separating our world of complex mediation from a romanticized era perceived to be simpler and more orderly? How do we put a medieval picture in motion? While my film is located within the many forms "neomedievalism" takes, my major preoccupation was finding a contemporary representation for a writer who seems very removed from us temporally, aesthetically, and morally, but whose view of human nature and longing would connect with a modern audience through imagery that is not stereotypically "medieval."[3]

I entered this much-talked-about genre from the artist's end of it when, upon request, I made *The Lover's Confession*, a machinima adaptation of selections from John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*, and this essay attempts to address the difficult questions posed above. I am

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2. Ibid., 10.

3. "Neomedievalism" is an enormous and provocative topic to which this essay can only refer in passing, and the term now encompasses a wide range of critical approaches that examine medieval tropes not merely in the medieval film or Internet game-world, but science fiction, thrillers, even socio-political and economic theory. This last posits that looking back to pre-modern politics can help us understand the present and predict the future, almost exactly as John Gower, speaking of the use of old stories, put it in his preface to *Vox Clamantis*. See Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977). For neomedievalism in general, see the seminal collection edited by Karl Fugelso, *Studies in Medievalism XIX: Defining Neomedievalism(s)* (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer 2010).

curiously bifurcated, here: in being a medievalist and a filmmaker, I must discuss my work from both a creative and a theoretical perspective, justifying my interpretation of three tales I picked for being most amenable to cinematic representation and contemporary comprehension. While Johnston's anthology focuses on an engagement with time—then and now—my analysis will focus on space and movement, specifically virtual space, as it reflects the poetic spaces of travelers, prisoners, and wanderers forced into uncanny heterotopias, both in the narrative and manuscript context. In making this animation, I used an environment that is by reputation quite unnatural: an online 3D virtual reality. Although discussion of "political neomedievalism" lies primarily outside the scope of this essay, the damaged world of the *Confessio*, one that "empeireth comunly," might appeal to a sense that our own societies are decadent and our very selves becoming splintered by the Internet. Each of these tales expresses in common some deviation from nature or deformation of character. In "The Travelers and the Angel," "Canace and Machaire," and "Florent," Gower addresses both love and *kynde*, examining that which is natural and unnatural, just and unjust, loving and unloving: the denatured man who will sacrifice one eye to blind his companion, the brother and sister whose sin of incest is exceeded by their father's unnatural rage, and the feckless youth faced with an unnatural union made natural by his act of generosity and obedience.

What Gower meant by "natural" or "real" is not the same as what we mean by these terms. We typically think of "reality" as a material world out there that is absolute and tangible, and "nature" as the original matter that we shape into practical and ornamental structures. Gower and other writers of his time saw Nature as both the servant directed by God to make his world and the integrity that should inhere in it. "Reality," by contrast, is the fallen world that has lost that divinity. For so many people, a *virtual* world is a fake world that like the Pied Piper seduces

good citizens away from the real one. What better place to remediate medieval artifice and fallen

nature than a collaborative virtual cave of ill-repute and unstable reality with its own form of

filmmaking?

It is important to note that these tales by Gower are adaptations of older tales in newish

media—turning classical and native material into rhymed tetrameter and Christian moral. So too

are the images Gower recirculates, from Canace's sword to the features of the Loathly Lady's

face. Today, images circulate and are reconstituted in blogs, Facebook, and the popular

"mashup."[4] Retelling has never been so popular and discussion of adaptation in old and new

media is proliferating across academia.[5] It holds special interest for medievalists: Daniel T. Kline

writes that "[l]ike contemporary gaming, the medieval period knew no such possessiveness

concerning 'original sources' but instead conserved its received materials, freely combining its

original matter with contemporary adaptations, commentaries, paraphrases, and additions."[6] I

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4. The process of repurposing and compositing has become a prominent commercial and aesthetic look in "the mashup." Originally a music term used to describe the combination of the vocal track from one song with the melody of another, "mashup" is now applied to a widespread practice on the Internet made available by relaxed copyright rules to create content from a number of disparate sources. A popular form of mashup on YouTube is the fan-video which takes clips from a favorite television show and reorganizes them with a (usually pirated) soundtrack as an homage, or a spoof, or a sentimental response to it.

5. See Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1999). See also Linda Hutcheon, *A Theory of Adaptation*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2013).

6. Daniel T. Kline, ed., *Digital Gaming Re-imagines the Middle Ages* (New York: Routledge, 2014). Discussion of film adaptation of the medieval is not confined to Johnson and Rouse: see also Kathleen Forni's *Chaucer's Afterlife: Adaptations in Recent Popular Culture* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013); Richard Burt, *Medieval and Early Modern Film and Media* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Anke Bernau and Bettina Bildhauer, eds., *Medieval Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009); and Kevin Harty, *The Reel Middle Ages: American, Western and Eastern European, Middle Eastern and Asian Films about Medieval Europe* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1999). See also Michael J. Alexander, *Medievalism: The Middle Ages in Modern England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007). An early

intend to show, too, how that analogue works in the world of Second Life® from which I take my sources, and I see the value of participating in such comparisons. But I approach them with a little caution. While I was also interested in imitating the "look" of a medieval manuscript in my edited machinima, it is important to keep in mind that all adaptation must address its difference from its source. A moving picture is not a poem, nor is it a manuscript.

I was intent on several important goals: capturing something of Gower's dramatic voice—in recreated Middle English—through my own narration, and merging it with images I shot in Second Life that had as little visual imitation of medieval clothing and props as I could manage. Because so many of them insist on visual realism, "medieval movies" can blind us to the medieval by "simply appropriating objects of the past." Departure from visual stereotype, I felt, would combine dissonance and familiarity, and release the powerful cynicism of these tales more effectively. I will set out my argument in two sections. Part I dwells on technique and genre. It explicates the principle behind adaptation by providing a) a brief examination of the problems inherent in turning poetic image into a visual reproduction, b) a definition of virtual reality and machinima, and c) a theory of frame, space, and movement in medieval manuscript, virtual world, and film. Part II provides a close analysis of the tales themselves and my remediation of them as they express and complicate Gower's treatment of nature and love in newly structured artifices.

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source is Umberto Eco's chapter, "Dreaming of the Middle Ages," in *Travels in Hyperreality: Essays*, trans. William Weaver (London: Harcourt Brace, 1986), 61–72.

PART I. Preliminaries

A. Poetic and Visual Image

Every image made of a written text necessarily reduces, abstracts, and sometimes distorts it, and medieval illuminations did so particularly. Consider the unnatural depiction of Canace, in child-bed with her seemingly grown infant son, writing a letter to her brother with one hand and stabbing herself in the chest with the other. This miniature is strange for those of us today who prefer a "snapshot" illustration taken from a key moment in the story, whereas this illustrator for one of the premier manuscripts of *Confessio Amantis* literalizes the dramatic rhetoric of Ovid's *Heroides* (*dextra tenet calamum, strictum tenet altera ferrum*), translated word for word by Gower in "The Tale of Canace and Machaire": "In my riht hond my penne I holde, / And in my left the swerd I kepe" (ll. 300–301). The problem is with the movement: the painting collapses time and space by compressing plot points in Ovid's tale without regard for verisimilitude or, seemingly, dignity, since she is prematurely (and comically) plunging the dagger into her chest while she writes. Where is the somber drama of Gower's suicide scene, which separates Canace's two acts of agency and unfolds chronologically? It is hard for the contemporary viewer to understand the principle of exemplum—and abstraction—that structured both story and illustration in the Middle Ages. This illumination from the gorgeous Morgan Manuscript (MS 126, fol.51v) is valuable for highlighting medieval approaches to representation. "*Ut pictura poesis*," wrote Horace in his *Ars Poetica*: "as is painting, so is poetry."

Horace's statement is not entirely true: painting is *not* like poetry, and neither is film. One can call an experimental film a cinépoem, or Zaum, and claim that merging image with text is "poetic," a term we use somewhat freely. But the simple fact is that a poem is meant to be read or heard and an image to be seen. An image, whether moving or still, engages a different cognitive process. Poetic words can inspire subjective mental images that no two readers "see" alike. Poetic words can please linguistically through rhyme, alliteration, assonance, consonance, chiasmus, tmesis and distorted syntax—or even confound picturable ideas through metaphor, double-meaning, tautology, oxymoron, synecdoche, metonymy, apostrophe, and other "colours" of rhetoric that do not translate easily into a painted image. If turned into a literal "picture," the Homeric simile is ludicrous. Shakespeare's famous lines in Sonnet 116—"Love's not Time's fool, though rosy lips and cheeks / Within his bending sickle's compass come"—pleases us on an aural and referential level, but appalls us if literally animated. I contend that the Morgan illumination provides just such an appalling translation of what was intended in Ovid to be a *figura* only. This has always been the challenge of remediation: just as a novel loses and gains something when turned into film, so too does a tale by Gower or Chaucer. It becomes something different; its new media is directed at a new audience at the same time that it reminds us of an older era. The notion that poetry itself could inspire mental images is as old as Greek *ekphrasis*. In later medieval manuscripts, the graphic depiction of stories tended more toward what we understand as illustration, but still maintained that strange association with *figura*. This brings me to the matter of imagined space.

In his plenary talk for the conference my film was part of, Russell Peck stated that the "linking of thought with language" in medieval cognition "creates what we think of as consciousness, an elaborate *staging process* as memory, motive, and sensory perception are re-

envisioned by the intellect."[7] His discussion was accompanied by medieval depictions of the

space within the head that holds the mind's eye, the symbolic organ of all the senses as it

witnesses the world's stage. Martha Dana Rust notes that in combining text and image, the

illustrated manuscript in late medieval English culture participates in an "interplay of diverse

semiotic systems." As a "matrix," it presents us with a "dangerous allure," "a space associated

with a physical book: an *imaginary 'world'* that offers . . . reflections of a variety of pre-and

extra-linguistic modes of interacting with and thinking through books."[8] Reading a text, or

hearing it read, then, creates both a stage for cognition and a world to get lost in, both of which

engage the mind's eye. The urge to supplement written or spoken texts with visual representation

is a pronounced phenomenon in Western culture, culminating today in the motion picture, the

music video, and the digital game world. So too is the urge to retell an ancient tale in new terms.[9]

In fact, it was *de rigeur* for medieval writers to do so, especially given a milieu in which new

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7. Russell A. Peck, "The Materiality of Cognition in the Staging and Regulation of Emotion in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*." My emphasis. Presented at the Third International Congress of the John Gower Society at the University of Rochester, June 30, 2014. I am especially grateful to Professor Peck for inviting me to make this film and for allowing me to cite his as yet unpublished essay.

8. Martha Dana Rust, *Imaginary Worlds in Medieval Books: Exploring the Manuscript Matrix* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 8. My emphasis. "Matrix" is an apt term that overlaps with my understanding of a virtual world. Latin for "womb," it also means a place of generation, and was the term used by William Gibson in his novel *Neuromancer* for the "cyberspace" his protagonist navigates. The "matrix" is also the computer-generated world of danger and illusion in the 1999 film by the same name (*The Matrix*, dir. Andy Wachowski and Lana Wachowski). About a digital world created by computers to enslave humans, it has a fair number of neomedieval elements in the classical and scriptural choice of names: Trinity, Nebuchadnezzar, Zion, the Oracle. Morpheus, like Darth Vader, even wears a long, black coat reminiscent of a priest.

9. The festschrift collection for Russell Peck edited by Thomas Hahn and Alan Lupack, *Retelling Tales: Essays in Honor of Russell Peck* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), is devoted to this topic in recognition of Peck's interest in it.

discoveries of classical literature proliferated in the universities and oral texts were written down because they could be: literacy among the middle class expanded in the High Middle Ages, making it a period of tremendous recycling—as did the printing press in the fifteenth century and as does the Internet today. John Gower was one of the most prolific of retellers: "*Scripture veteris capiunt exempla futuri*," he wrote in the prologue to *Vox Clamantis*,[10] which Peck quoted in the epigram to his 1966 edition of *Confessio*, translating: "Writings of antiquity contain examples for the future."[11]

My hope for *The Lover's Confession* is not only that it "stage" these tales by remediating them for new intellectual and artistic impact, but that it might introduce John Gower to viewers unfamiliar with him. Chaucer eclipsed his prolific contemporary, and *The Canterbury Tales* has been repeatedly remediated, even in machinima.[12] Gower's *Confessio* offers different stories, including an important analogue to "The Wife of Bath's Tale." The last few decades have seen a rise in interest in Gower studies that have rescued his work from obscurity, but not for the general public. Formerly deemed dull and didactic, Gower's narrative reveals a medieval structure, framework, and allegory that seems off-putting to those accustomed to Chaucer's charisma and presumed modernity. Of the many copies made of the *Confessio*, the Morgan is one of the most spectacularly ornamented. I argue that the medieval collaboration of author,

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10. John Gower. *Vox Clamantis*, line 1, vol. 4 in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 4 vols., ed. G. C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 20.

11. John Gower. *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell A. Peck (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, 1968), xi.

12. Besides Pier Paolo Pasolini's famous *Canterbury Tales* (1972), Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Tale" and the "Pardoner's Tale" have been re-retold in machinima (See "The Wife of Bath's Tale," made by Andrew O'Hara et al., https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i2uCNXs5uIE and Jiake Liu's "Pardoner's Tale," https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4KjLWTWJ--o, both made in the online game World of Warcraft—both accessed December 22, 2014).

scribe, illuminator, and reader, along with the penchant for gathering stories and adapting them, is reflected by filming in a multiply-occupied virtual world like Second Life that exhibits its users' recyclable creations. The artistic spaces I find there provide analogues not only for the spaces through which Gower's characters wander, but also for the symbolic iconography that informs Gower's work. Cherry Manga's "Insanity" with its yellow sea full of eyes became an icon in my film for Envy; Igor Ballyhoo's "Metamorphoses" with its walking skeletons became its judgment; Jenne Dibou's "Forbidden City" became Eolus's prison for his children; Fae Varriale's "Daughter of the Wind," drifting across the screen, represented the honor that Florent was asked to grant women, while the menacing environment provided by the Spencer Museum symbolized the uncanny world of the Loathly Lady. These borrowed environments fit a taste in medieval literature for repurposed material in a mixed media and collaborative project. The multiply-occupied online digital "sandbox" environment called Second Life offers splendid spaces for representing that of Gower's characters, and machinima is the eye that, like the manuscript page, commits them to memory and further remediation.

B. Virtuality and Machinima

Electronic virtual worlds continue to provoke discussion about the dangers of being seduced by a shadow.[13] The term "virtual," formerly having the connotation of "practically" or "all but," now refers most often to a digitally produced environment in a computer program or on the Internet. Avatars are digital representations of living people who operate them, but the boundary between

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13. The negative criticism of online computer games, the obsessions it inspires, the critique of Second Life in particular as an artificial world populated by adulterers, pedophiles and losers in general is too vast for me to catalogue, and it drowns out any praise given to its ingenuities and venues for unique artistic experiences.

the "real" (deemed "true" because it is physically tangible) and the "virtual" (deemed "false" because it is merely mimetic of the physically tangible) gets blurry. Two longstanding 3D virtual worlds, Second Life and World of Warcraft®, can be occupied online by many users simultaneously who experience things together in an electronic matrix or "cyberspace" that imitates a visible, three-dimensional environment through which they move using the keyboard. Friendships are made in there, the names players pick for their avatars are frequently used on Facebook and in blogs, and Second Life increases the illusion of an occupied world by calling its users "residents" as opposed to "players." So it is no wonder that Second Life residents bristle when told by outsiders that they aren't *real*, although they are representative.[14] Many metaphysical arguments can be summoned that address the extensions of the body and personhood in a virtual world along with the cognitive and the visual.[15] In machinima, however, a filmmaker can detach from her subject identification as resident and make her avatar an object, or actor, in a film.

Machinima, therefore, is a kind of puppetry. Originally called a "Quake Film" because it was developed in that game, it refers to a technique of filming that began with the "replay" function, allowing players to record their best battle scenes for later viewing. Hackers altered the

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14. Facebook has removed a number of pages belonging to people who have made accounts using their Second Life names, insisting that a page has authenticity only when it presents a real-world name and photograph. This insensitive maneuver has caused widespread outrage among those who connect their adopted names, as do I, with the art, literature, film and other products they make in virtual worlds or with the friends they have made there. The term "Second Life" does not suggest an entirely new "life": it is an imaginative extension of life already lived.

15. See Tom Boellstorff, *Coming of Age in Second Life: An Anthropologist Explores the* Virtually *Human* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008) and Mark Stephen Meadows, *I, Avatar: The Culture and Consequences of Having a Second Life* (Berkeley, CA: New Riders, 2008) for eyewitness examination and discussion of the effects of virtuality on human expression and identity.

behavior of the game to create and record their own stories independent of its rules, and "Quake

Film" was renamed when this technology spread to other virtual platforms. "Machinima" is a

portmanteau word ("machine" + "cinema"), and the genre quickly grew in popularity, garnering

attention, awards, even commercial success.[16] It is an awkward and curiously redundant term,

but it uncovers the sense that what is filmed is a mechanical representation of a mechanical

representation that has no referent because it is original. Had he lived to see it, Jean Baudrillard

might have considered it the perfect hyperreal in being a vast signifying playground without a

signified.[17] However, while they are mathematically generated or scanned in, "objects" in a

virtual world occupy specific intersections of points in 3D space that are locatable. Rather like

real-life objects seen in films, objects captured in Second Life machinima may still exist on the

simulator after the camera is shut off. In multiple-player virtual worlds like Second Life, then,

they can still be experienced by other residents who may change or move them. Not so digital

programs like Blender or Autodesk Maya that create an object not experienced outside the

process of filming it.[18] "Machinima" is often replaced by the term "Real Time Animation," its

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16. For a detailed discussion of machinima and its operations, see Phylis Johnson and Donald Pettit, eds., *Machinima: The Art and Practice of Virtual Filmmaking* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2012).

17. Jean Baudrillard. *Simulacra and Simulations*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994).

18. It should be noted that a number of digital programs such as iClone® and MovieStorm® have been developed for use by a sole animator who builds a 3D set to film in, including her puppets; and, in being shot in "real time," these films qualify as machinima but without a participatory virtual world. For a discussion of the various "realities" presented by the virtual, see Jeffrey Bardzell, "Machinimatic Realism: Capturing and Presenting the 'Real World' of Video Games," in *The Machinima Reader*, ed. Lowood and Nitsche (Boston: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2011), 195–218; for an ontology of "being" virtual and its ethical repercussions, see Sandra Danilovich, "Virtual Lens of Exposure: Aesthetics, Theory, and Ethics of Documentary Filmmaking in Second Life." In *Understanding Machinima*, ed. Jenna Ng (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013), 167–86.

distinct feature being that it shoots its footage in time experienced by the participants, whereas frame-based, stop-motion animation or CGI effects create the illusion of time. Time passed in a virtual world is actual time, just as it is on a stage set with live actors. These may not be organic bodies, but living people are pulling their virtual strings and often think of themselves as actors, especially if they contribute their voices. Just as a cameraman can dolly past objects that take up space in the natural world, the software camera operated by a joystick can orbit around 3D digital constructions and avatars. Machinima has flourished online and opened up a form of experimental cinema that has recently become a topic of intense academic scrutiny.[19]

My virtual world of choice is the aforementioned Second Life, which is not a game, but rather a vast social virtual world inhabited simultaneously by thousands of distant users made present by their avatars. Meanwhile, the numbers of small, private virtual worlds similar to Second Life are increasing exponentially, interconnected on the "HyperGrid."[20] These worlds offer a splendid extension of both Peck's notions of cognitive staging processes, and the "manuscript matrix" that Rust describes: medieval reader and writer become lost among depicted fictional beings on a "threshold to an otherworldly dimension" in which "characters [here represented by avatars] get caught up in a virtual realm . . . and thereby become subject to, and

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19. Since 2011, three academic anthologies have been published on machinima: Henry Lowood and Michael Nitsche, eds., *The Machinima Reader* in 2011; Phylis Johnson and Donald Pettit, eds., *Machinima: The Art and Practice of Virtual Filmmaking* in 2012; and Jenna Ng, ed., *Understanding Machinima: Essays on Filmmaking in Virtual Worlds* in 2013.

20. See OpenSimulator's "Grid List"—a list of the most visited Open Source worlds: http://opensimulator.org/wiki/Grid_List (accessed November 24, 2014). There is even a program for building one's world on a thumb drive, called "Sim on a Stick": http://www.simonastick.com/ (accessed November 24, 2014).

sometimes subjects in, the books they read and write."[21] Second Life's "dangerous allure" is well

known along with its addiction. Lacking the rules required by online games, Second Life and

many of its spinoffs allow its residents to group according to their various interests, to modify

their digital appearance, pick from thousands of different shapes they can change even further,

purchase or design and sell clothing materials,[22] create their own role-play in which they become

subject to a "book" they read and write,[23] establish their own communities, rent land, buy

structures and furnishings, build their own environments, animate their avatars using motion-

capture software that they sell to others, and visit the creations of their fellow builders *en masse*.

Ninety percent of the content in Second Life is created by its residents, and ranges from

naturalistic to surrealistic to cartoonish, depending on the preferences and skill sets of the

builder.

Community and collaboration play a large role in the experience of Second Life,

providing machinimatographers some of the advantages of traditional filmmaking by harnessing

the work of other people—as actors, scripters, artists, musicians, and builders. This involves

using the objects and scenery crafted by cutting-edge 3D artists along with their animations and

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21. Rust, *Imaginary Worlds*, 8. Gower and Chaucer include themselves as characters in their fictions and invite the reader to identify with them.

22. Second Life has its own currency, the "linden," whereby users, called "residents," rent land and buy all the accoutrements to furnish it if they can't make it themselves. Clothing, hair, even bodily features and accessories are available both in Second Life at virtual malls and online at the Second Life Market Place. https://marketplace.secondlife.com/ (accessed October 21, 2014).

23. Roleplay in Second Life performs as it does in other online games, and there are areas marked off for specific activities, such as "Hathian City," a post-Katrina Louisiana slum with long, wandering streets exquisitely detailed. Players sign up as a specific character. The usual Terms of Service ("behave nicely") are suspended and residents can be bullied. Dialogue is typed using quotation marks and descriptive language: *Victor approached the man lying on the bench. "Hey, bud, do you have some place to go that's warm?"*

soundbytes. Machinima made here can be a kind of "found art" that pays tribute to work meant primarily to be experienced via the avatar, and made available cinematically to outsiders. Many artists in Second Life, now, depend on machinimatographers to record their three-dimensional builds, and many in-world curators set up film challenges for that reason. Consequently, the Second Life "art machinima" is unique among other machinima as a documentary of an environment that will be dismantled, much like filming a museum exhibit. But the film contests began demanding "retellings" of these environments: contenders are asked to use a virtual sculpture or landscape to convey a message independent from the artist's intention—in essence, to remediate these inventions.[24] Many Second Life machinimatographers take pride in their repurposed materials, often turning to found footage online to mix with their clips.[25]

As a consequence, Second Life specialized in a kind of machinima distinct from that made initially in predesigned games, employing a film style reminiscent of cinépoetry and experimental animation, which rejects realism and straightforward narrative, emphasizing the mysterious and evocative use of mixed media. Such machinima combine shots of "inworld" *objet d'arts* with the superimposition of titles, music, overlays, frames within frames and other features that create extralinguistic interplay and counter the conventions of traditional cinema. This film genre has wide-ranging origins and analogues, and scholar and filmmaker Michelle M.

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24. The University of Western Australia maintains a presence in Second Life and offers an annual art and film contest where one must set one's machinima in an established scene and/or include shots of the virtual art it exhibits in any new context. See its weblog where it showcases its art and machinima challenges: http://uwainsl.blogspot.com/ (accessed November 10, 2014). No other virtual world conducts contests quite like this or encourages such wide-spread collaboration among artists.

25. See, for instance, the films made by Joe Zazulak (Spiral Silverstar) which incorporate traditional film images with shots taken in Second Life and Kitely: https://www.youtube.com/user/SpiralSiverstar (accessed November 10, 2014).

Brown declares that the Internet is an ideal venue for the online productions of cinépoems, sometimes called "video poems." Her article emphasizes an interchange between producer and consumer that is especially vibrant on the Internet in "an emerging artistic genre that finds its main space online [and] is also constantly evolving." [26] One of its qualities is its abstract image and chronology, leaving behind the excessive orbiting and zooms indulged in by 3D filmmakers and machinimatographers intent on showing off the rotundity of their digital world, and, in the case of Second Life, hiding its limited range of animations and facial expressions. This defect, while not ideal in other circumstances, gives my film a formality of image and movement that resembles the stateliness of medieval dance and the repetitive meter of Gower's poems. Combined with superimposed words and framing techniques, I intended its images to resemble the multi-media qualities of a medieval illuminated manuscript.

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26. Michelle M. Brown, "Cinépoetry: Decoding a Converged Genre in the Consumer-Producer Culture of the Internet." http://www.cinepoetry.com. Along with Man Ray's *L'Etoile de mer* (1928), based on the poem by Robert Desnos (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7DKREHb5QfA), Brown references George Aguilar (a.k.a. "Cecil Hirvi"), whose machinima *A Placid Ocean of Uncertain Liberties* (2011) was made in a Second Life environment by Rebecca Bashley, and featured the work of other Second Life artists: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mGjkeiX_6tg. For discussion of a similar artist, see Lee Jamieson, "The Lost Prophet of Cinema: The Film Theory of Antonin Artaud," *Senses of Cinema* 44 (2007): http://sensesofcinema.com/2007/feature-articles/film-theory-antonin-artaud/. I would direct interested viewers to more recent Second Life machinima poetry, especially that by Natascha Randt and Karima Hoisan (*The Connection*, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gKO7pt_UCzI), Iono Allen (*Chairs*, https://vimeo.com/105391482), Saveme Oh (*I'll Meet You on the Other Side*, https://vimeo.com/89850579), and many others. Machinima-poetry is of course not limited to Second Life, but made in diverse venues such as iClone, Moviestorm, The Movies®, Sims®, Unreal Tournament®, and others. A favorite of mine is Tom Jantol's award-winning *Dear Fairy*, https://vimeo.com/11618270). (All accessed December 22, 2014.)

C. The Cinematic and Manuscript Frame

The *Confessio* is a long frame tale. Its borrowed and repurposed stories are told within a larger one in which Amans seeks counsel and confession from Venus's priest, Genius, who tells him through *exempla* what vices to avoid as both lover and courtier. The sections they are contained in are further embellished by statements couched in Latin poetry, and then by division into books that address the conventional sins. The illuminated manuscripts structure it even more. On the folio pages of the Morgan there are edges: those made by the columns of text, the framed illuminations, the lines around the capitals, the decorative floral margins, and the passages in Latin are set apart from those in English by rubrication. One can look at a richly decorated medieval manuscript folio and forget that it was meant to be read. To what, then, do we pay attention? The English? The Latin? The illustrations? The decorations? Or all of them?

A frame around a conventional painting establishes a work of art as separate from the environment it exists in so that we focus on it and forget our surroundings. It is a *parergon*, something that "works outside" of something else that it both is and is not a part of, but "gives rise to it," as Jacques Derrida famously pointed out.[27] It separates the painting from not-the-painting and directs our eye, in which case it is meant to be as invisible as the window frame through which we focus on a distant scene, but visible when we look at the wall beside it.[28] In

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27. Jacques Derrida, *The Truth in Painting*, trans. G. Bennington and I. McLeod (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 9. Immanuel Kant is the originator of the term *parergon* as "ornament" around a work of art (*Critique of Judgement*, 2nd edition, trans. J. H. Bernard [London: Macmillan, 1914], 75).

28. The concept of the framed painting as window develops primarily in Renaissance art, where it is associated with the rise of visual realism. See Samuel Edgerton, Jr.'s book *The Renaissance Rediscovery of Linear Perspective* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976). Late medieval illuminations are precursors to such, and to modern illustrations in books, but the development of framed pictures in pre-modern manuscripts is a complex aesthetic wherein text and image are much more intimately related and show varying styles over their years of development. For the

the Morgan manuscript, however, such invisibility is impossible, as the framed illuminations are often flush with the rubricated Latin that precedes them and fitted to the width of the columns of text. Image, text, decoration, gloss, all of it contributed to the look of the page, each medium supporting and competing with the other. How then, does one translate that aesthetic into a motion picture? In starting out with Second Life, I found myself approaching Rust's initial description of the reader from the opposite direction: forcing a three-dimensional virtual realm, already its own occupied Otherworld, into a two-dimensional frame so that it would *look* like a painting of a virtual realm the reader imagines becoming three-dimensional. My film begins with my avatar as reader, standing in the library at Haveit Neox's ACC Alpha, but it vacillates between a semi-realistic style and highly artificial, decorative, and flattened imagery, notably in the "Frame Tale" and "Florent," expanding and contracting space to suit the nature of each tale and to express the artificiality of frame.

Space itself can be framed. A museum stages its space, the difference being that the visitor is surrounded by it, the frame having expanded to allow the gaze more scope. Such artistic spaces were not unknown to the Middle Ages: the *hortus conclusus* with its carefully pruned trees and *parterres* were the privileges of the aristocracy and places of wonder, and they inspired authors to write of them. One such garden is prominently featured in the thirteenth-century *Roman de la Rose*, the walls of which depict the allegorized vices that are excluded from it. Amans in *Confessio Amantis* encounters Venus and Cupid within a clearing in a wood. All of

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vigorous interaction of frame and subject in Anglo-Saxon manuscripts, see Asa Simon Mittman and Susan M. Kim's chapter, "Framing 'the Real': Spatial Relations on the Page and in the World," in *Inconceivable Beasts: The Wonders of the East in the* Beowulf *Manuscript* (Tempe, AZ: ACMRS, 2013), 137–80; for a discussion of Gower's narrative framing and its visual analogues in the Morgan MS, see Rust's Chapter 3 in *Imaginary Worlds*, 117-64.

Second Life is a *hortus conclusus*, difficult of access to the outsider, and containing gardens

within gardens.

Space in-world is divided up into what are called "sims," short for the physical server

machine simulating a region one visits. Sims that are not adjacent to any others are encompassed

by virtual ocean and are called "islands." In every respect, these islands are framed spaces, each

one allowing its owner to shape it at will and give the illusion of a complete surround, forgetting

the frame that is also the computer screen edged by the user-interface controls. In making

machinima, one cannot ignore that invisible frame. The photographer and filmmaker in a virtual

world understand that no matter how they move their avatars, whatever is on the flat screen is a

potential snapshot or film clip. Film, then, frames space, as machinima frames virtual space. The

Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas sponsors its own island. It is famous outside

of Second Life for its uniquely striking visual replication of a "Bogon Flux" merged with a

"Petrovsky Flux," named after Ivan Petrovsky, a Soviet mathematician.[29] Second Life scripters

and builders have given it a steam-punk representation in Second Life, setting in motion dingy

tunnels and capsules that form immense branching structures governed by this equation. These

eventually separate and collapse to ominous sound effects and the process starts over again. So it

is alive with motion and noise. Visitors are offered a hard-hat to wear, and the rolling structures

can literally sweep one's avatar off its feet, as they did, quite by accident, to Florent. Because it

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29. The "Petrovsky lacuna" is "a region [in the mathematical sense] where the fundamental
solution of a linear hyperbolic partial differential equation vanishes." In elementary terms, it
expresses a statement about how a process evolves, and is useful in physics, biology,
aerodynamics, even economics. See http://www.quazoo.com/q/Petrovsky_lacuna (accessed
October 21, 2014). The builders/scripters of the Second Life Petrovsky Flux are Blotto Epsilon
and Cutea Benelli. See their post about this virtual structure which they call "organic," in that
each time it grows again it does so differently and unpredictably to the visitor.
http://www.spencerart.ku.edu/exhibitions/secondlife.shtml (accessed October 21, 2014).

is so strangely beautiful, featuring other surreal elements such as hopping chairs and obsolescent machinery, it is well represented on the Internet by film clips and photographs, demonstrating the ability of virtual worlds to showcase extraordinary interactive art in carefully staged ways that are further altered by film and photography.

Could such spaces operate as a kind of cinépoetry in the terms Brown uses? One particular environment functions beautifully as a virtual cinépoem—"Foul Whisperings, Strange Matters"—a collaborative project in Second Life based on Shakespeare's *Macbeth*.[30]

It provides many of the features required in cinépoetry: phrases from the play float across the dreary landscape, while actors' voices speak them, and the visitor is invited to wander through a maze that represents Macbeth's deranged mind. Inspired by that build, I tried to translate Chaucer's "Pardoner's Prologue and Tale" into a *place* equipped with traps, sounds, corpses, a paper church, hovering texts and floating papal bulls that I laboriously made and through which one wanders, presumably, at will.[31] But because I stubbornly kept to Chaucer's narrative, unlike "Foul Whisperings," I needed to direct my visitor's willful wanderings with signposts. In either case, turning space into a poem or a poem into a machinima seriously compromises the uses of

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30. Designed by Kerreen Ely Harper, Angela Thomas, and Kate Richards, sponsored by the Australian Council and the New Media Consortium.

31. My build was the subject of a talk I gave ("The Virtual Pardoner: Creating a Second Life Supplement of Chaucer's Troubling Text") on Tamara F. O'Callaghan's panel at the 45th International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo, MI (2010).

language unless image and language evolve together. Gower's poem read aloud is different from its presentation on parchment. That rarely stops us from remediating both in a visual and aural adaptation. The spoken Middle English creates its own difficulties, however, because it requires translation.

I could have voiced my stories in modern English, but the sound of Gower's original was important to me. The truest cinépoetry does not use subtitles, which are external to the work of art. The use of subtitles, or any written text at all, is part of an ongoing debate among machinimatographers, some of whom insist that images alone should convey meaning. But conventional subtitles in foreign films are meant to be unobtrusive and mine are not, even when they function as subtitles. When I put printed words on my films, they frame or are framed by the images they accompany. In *The Lover's Confession*, they move, stretch, whirl away, change color and fade out, often in concert with the movement on the screen or in time with the music. And thus the matter of focus becomes even more crucial: are my titles distracting? To what should a viewer pay attention? The image? The spoken word? The written translation? Or all of the above?

I told myself that my goal was to imitate the reciprocal systems of representation—text, rubric, and illumination—that encourage a dilation of focus presented by a medieval manuscript. My titles function as glosses in this film. The tension of hearing one language and reading another reflects the multilingual manuscript page. I frame scenes within other scenes, draw attention to frames, and bombard the senses with simultaneous information that the viewer reads, watches, interprets, and hears. However, this comparison is a little facile. Machinima is "sudden film," adapted to contemporary viewers who require immediate gratification, and *The Lover's Confession* is longer than the four-and-a-half minute limit expected of this genre. Medieval

writers were much more tolerant than we are today of *digressio* and *amplificatio*. Language itself was poetically and argumentatively ornamented, a taste that was mirrored in manuscript layout. Writers and scribes expected their readers to keep in mind a complex structure that was accommodated by a weighty book they could examine at leisure. What we lack today are patience, memory, and attention span. In the fourteenth century, an illuminator could deviate from the literary source. That portrait of Canace illustrates Ovid's story, not Gower's. Moreover, medieval manuscripts do not provide musical scores, nor do their images move.

Film motion is a significant and problematic departure from the experience of reading a manuscript, but movement is often suggested in medieval miniatures. For instance, the illustrated monsters in both "The Wonders of the East" in MS. Cotton Vitellius and the later "Marvels of the East" in MS. Cotton Tiberius extrude beyond the boundaries drawn around them: an escaping hand or foot threatens to invade the text with motion. The Blemmye in Cotton Tiberius even grasps the edges of its "cage," meeting our gaze and waiting, it seems, to step out toward us.[32] Turning the folio page and seeing it must have shocked its readers. The menacing figure of "God's Zeal" in Hildegard of Bingen's *Scivias* is caught in mid-flight, one wing extended forward out of its frame.[33] It casts a new light on the "medieval motion picture."

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32. Reproduced in Mittman and Kim, plate 6, 150: MS Cotton Tiberius B.v., fol. 82r. Of this famous monster, Dana M. Oswald writes that it "threatens to enter the human world, and his possession of an all-too-human penis indicates his potential to reproduce in it" (*Monsters, Gender and Sexuality in Medieval English Literature* [Woodbridge: D. S. Brewer, 2010], 52). For an online visual, see the British Library's "Online Gallery": http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/onlineex/illmanus/cottmanucoll/l/011cottibb00005u00082000.html (accessed January 22, 2015).

33. Reproduced in *Scivias*, Book 3, Vision 5, trans. Mother Columba Hart and Jane Bishop (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990), 369.

In a virtual world one can supply that motion. I uploaded my picture of a medieval frame to Second Life, applied it to an opening I built in-world and had Florent walk out of it in *real time* while I filmed him. He passes us and out of view while the camera pushes into the fantasy world from which he emerged. Would Gower have found this remediation unnatural and excessive, or apt? Things in nature obviously move; Gower's characters go from one place to the next, or are kept from going, or go astray. The rest of this essay discusses my representation, in motion, of Gower's philosophical and allegorical spaces wherein his protagonists err, and I wander; for making these films continually offered me new insights into Gower's originals.

Part II. Love and Kynde in Three Tales by Gower

Natura is depicted variously over the mid-to-late Middles Ages and was largely symbolic, a force subordinate to God but cast in the role of a goddess and an artificer. She presided over the physical world carving and hammering it into shape, much as the builder does in Second Life.[34] My Loathly Lady in "Florent" is an ugly portrait of her as she chops her wood in a landscape made up of machinery. *Kynde*, Nature's English counterpart, is more often used to refer to her force, the inherent nature of a thing, a person, a society, or, as Matthew Irvin writes, "the nature by which things are alike."[35] Barbara Newman traces the rise of Nature as a female personification and her various transmutations while Hugh White debunks the popular contemporary notion that Nature was primarily seen as "good," an idea especially relevant to

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34. Second Life offers the builder an in-world set of tools. The basic building block of all virtual matter is the "primitive," or "prim," which comes in a variety of shapes and which can be stretched, altered, textured, "tortured," and linked with other prims.

35. Irvin, *Poetic Voices*, 150.

"Canace and Machaire."[36] I am interested, here, in the questions Gower asks about the role of

Nature in the exercise of love, and the first words to appear in the film are taken from the first

line of Gower's Latin prologue to Liber Primus: *Naturatus amor nature legibus orbem / Subdit. .*

. . [Love fashioned for nature's ends subjects the world to nature's laws.] It is a subtle criticism

that informs the entire book: if the lover loves only to satisfy natural (animal) passions, he or she

is subject to the laws of Nature, the *lex naturalis* that should be put into harmony by *lex positiva*,

the laws of Church and society, so long as the latter is justly upheld. The Latin preface continues,

as Andrew Galloway translates it:

> [Love] incites harmonized ones to wildness (or: incites wild ones to
>
> harmony). Love is seen to be the prince of this world, whose bounty rich
>
> man, poor man, and every man demand. Equal in the contest are Love
>
> and Fortune, both of which turn their blind wheels to entrap the people.
>
> Love is a sharp salvation, a troubled quiet, a pious error, a warring peace,
>
> a sweet wound, a soothing ill.[37]

Starting with this series of contradictions (which in themselves are a convention), Gower gives

love a complexity not seen in treatments of *fin amour* before: connected to "nature," writes Peter

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36. Barbara Newman, *God and the Goddesses: Vision, Poetry and Belief in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 51–44; Hugh White, *Nature, Sex and Goodness in a Medieval Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

37. John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, Bk.1, vol 1. 2nd ed. Ed. Russell A. Peck, trans. Andrew Galloway (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2006). All citations from *Confessio Amantis* are from this edition, including those from volumes 2 and 3. The Latin reads: *[et] unanimes concitat esse feras: / Huius enim mundi Princeps amor esse videtur, / Cuius eget diues, pauper et omnis ope. / Sunt in agone pares amor et fortuna, que cecas / Plebis ad insidias vertit uterque rotas. / Est amor egra salus, vexata quies, pius error, / Bellica pax, vulnus dulce, suave malum* (73).

Nicholson, it "binds us to all of love's other creatures in the endless perpetuation of the species, and no human, no matter how wise or powerful, is exempt."[38]

The three tales I selected from *Confessio Amantis* draw from Gower's *exempla* of the three sins most prone to destroying one's connection with God's love by blocking one's charity for another human being and toppling the ordered structure of moral behavior and personal salvation: Envy (with Covetousness) is the focus in "The Tale of the Travelers and the Angel" from Book 2, Malencolie (or Wrath) in "The Tale of Canace and Machaire" from Book 3, and a minor version of Pride (Complaint) in "The Tale of Florent" from Book 1.

The Frame Tale

Originally, each film was a separate machinima that I posted independently. I added selections from the Frame Tale last in order to put all three in Gower's rhetorical context and identify their specific messages within a simplified version of Gower's structure. Doing so highlights them as part of something older and more formal, and calls attention, yet again, to the frame and in which I feature images of frames. Shot entirely in Neox's Second Life environment, it begins with a double of Gower's Amans, the contemporary reader who is set against a framed painting by Ferdinand Heilbuth called "The Reader." My avatar holds the *Confessio* in Neox's virtual library, reading as Amans listens to the advice of Genius and his exempla, and reacting to each story the way a chorus would. I thought it appropriate to introduce the films in this way, as

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38. Peter Nicholson, *Love and Ethics in Gower's* Confessio Amantis (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005), 41.

the Prologue to the *Confessio* opens with a tribute paid to books and those who learn from them

by writing (or filming):

> Of hem that writen ous tofore
>
> The bokes duelle, and we therfore
>
> Ben tawht of that was write tho:
>
> Forthi good is that we also
>
> In oure tyme among ous hiere
>
> Do wryte of newe some matiere,
>
> Essampled of these olde wyse. (ll. 1–7)

Neox is a gifted artist in real life with a talent for calligraphy and sculpture, and he agreed

not only to let me film the Frame Tale in his admired environments, ACC Alpha Centaury and

the Port of Sparquerry, but he also played the character Genius. His 3D builds are notable for

their graceful mixture of the rotund and the flat, the surreal and the semi-real, outside and

inside—essentially the natural and the unnatural. It was well-suited for representing the medieval

imaginary. Its complex spaces remind one of a fairy tale era with its European and Middle

Eastern murals, villas, waterfalls, centaurs, promenading statues, and the library tapestries

(columns of his charcoal sketches accompanied by his imaginary writing) that serve as the

background and frame for each tale's introduction. His ACC Alpha is dominated by what he

calls his "Paper Observatory" and an abstracted figure of an astronomer turning with his

telescope. It furnishes the image for the opening voice-over: "I may noght strecche up to the

hevene / Min hand" (Book 1, ll.1–2). Gower never shows us or even names the symbolic beloved

in his *Confessio*, but I provide an image of her as a geisha, as unattainable and distant in space

and concept: Amans is "further fro [his] love / Than erth is fro the hevene above" (ll. 105–106).

The frame tale also allowed me to introduce each story along with its moral by means of an actual frame that I modified from the Plimpton MS 265, fol. 37 at Columbia University: leaving the ornamental margins in place, I scooped out the text in Photoshop and made it transparent, such that I could position the titles and characters of each tale behind or in front of this frame, or moving through it. Despite the frame picture to which I give the isolated word "LOVE" (Venus and Cupid in an erotic embrace), a pacing Genius makes it clear to Amans that his teachings will address VICE, this isolated word framed by a dark mural and stern judges. The first lesson Genius teaches is the sin of Envy.

The Tale of the Travelers and the Angel (Book 2: ll. 291–382)

There is no love in this tale at all, and nothing natural. The characters travel, so finding the right environment to represent this undescribed space was important, and the camera pans slowly over landscapes to indicate a steady progression that culminates with the blinded man. *Invidia* in Latin, the source for our word "envy," is "evil-look," deriving from *invidere*, "to look with hostile intent." In antiquity it emerged from superstitious belief in the "evil eye," and came to be the second of the Seven Deadly Sins in medieval thought, which is soul-destroying in the malice it directs at another man whose good fortune it scrutinizes. Gower's "Tale of the Travelers and the Angel,"

adapted from "Fable 22" by Avianus (ca. 400 C.E.) makes some interesting changes to the earlier story of Jupiter's jest: send Phoebus Apollo to a pair of men—one *Cupidus*, the other *Invidus*—and see what happens when tested by the promise of reward, the trick being that whatever the one asks the other will receive two-fold. Avarice prompts Envy to ask first, hoping to increase his reward of what he assumes the other man will request. But the envious man will not allow his fellow to rob him of his gift by getting more of it, so he asks to be blinded in one eye so the other will live in perpetual darkness. Apollo laughs ironically when he returns with news to Jupiter of the mean-spiritedness of men, having learned how Envy rejoices in the evil that happens to another.

R. F. Yeager notes that Gower's version removes the cynicism of both Jupiter and Apollo, the former earnestly seeking to do reparation for the ills of humanity but not knowing them, and the latter turned into an unknown angel who in taking the form of a man gets the travelers to quarrel, and thus determines the character of each. Such a change, says Yeager, highlights the Christian connection of blindness with "dysfunctional reason": "Envy is an especially mental sin, a sin of misdirected choice resulting from, and causing, a distorted way of thinking about (of 'seeing') the world."[39] Envy is "evil-look" in two senses in this tale: to look maliciously upon another's fortunate prospects, but also to be disfigured and blind in so doing. For that reason I wanted a space for these travelers to move through that was mean, trashy, and degraded, in order to suggest the spiritual poverty of these sojourners driving together in a battered car through the Wastelands, a simulation of a post-apocalyptic future that has destroyed both nature and community. It had to be supplemented by frightening images to express malice's

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39. R. F. Yeager, "'Scripture Veteris Capiunt Exempla Futuri': John Gower's Transformation of a Fable of Avianus," in *Retelling Tales: Essays in Honor of Russell Peck,* ed. Thomas Hahn and Alan Lupack (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 1997), 341–53 (348).

unnatural state of mind: "For it acordeth noght to kinde / Min oghne harm to seche and finde / Of that I schal my brother grieve (369–71)," Genius counsels Amans. Cherry Manga's "Insanity," an exhibit sponsored by Ux Hax and Romy Nayar on their island in Second Life, was built to illustrate the terror of schizophrenia and depression. But I saw in her horrifying landscape (filled with disembodied eyes, blind and decapitated heads, tortured faces growing out of the hills), the perfect image of "dysfunctional reason." Gower begins his prologue to Detraction (a subset of Envy) with a description of the evil words that emerge from the mouth of the envious,[40] and Manga's environment is dominated by one such image: a female figure half buried in the yellow sea vomits a ribbon that rises to the sky culminating in the head and shoulders of a shouting man, perhaps a soul that cannot escape from its madness. For Jupiter and his angel, I chose clips I took of Igor Ballyhoo's equally disturbing exhibit in Second Life, "Metamorphoses," with its skeletal and mechanical figures who turn great red wheels as they march. My intention was to portray the world of the gods as alien to humans, but ordered and severe in contrast to the sallow, melting images of decay in the other environments. The androgynous angel wears a crown of skulls and takes the form of a hitchhiker who hangs out with the arguing men at a seedy diner. At the end he is baffled by Envy's decision but accepts the ever-declining state of humanity ("the world empeireth comunly / And yit wot non the cause why"—ll. 367–68), departing in silence. Of the three, I think this is the most faithful representation of Gower's message throughout the *Confessio* of man's fall from both divine love and good rule, and also the most relevant in terms of political neomedievalism. It has a decided science fiction feel to it, in that the destroyed

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40. *Inuidie pars est detraccio pessima, pestem / Que magis infamem flatibus oris agit.* "The worst part of Envy is Detraction, which stirs up a plague of infamy with the gustings of the mouth." *Confessio Amantis*, vol 2, ed. Russell A. Peck, trans. Andrew Galloway (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2003), 66.

countryside and crumbling houses of the Wastelands suggest a future ruined by an economy based on consumption (the reaching hand in Manga's "Insanity," the rotting heads). I made my mechanical recitation of Gower's tetrameter match the digital drumbeat of Kevin MacLeod's "Invariance," hoping to convey tension, suspense, and unnatural speaking, but also the relentless movement toward technological disaster.

The Tale of Canace and Machaire (Book 3: ll. 143–336)

The characters in this tale are confined. The original takes place in one room alone, in which brother and sister sleep together and make love, from which the brother escapes, in which the sister gives birth, writes her letter, and dies, and into which the knight and the father intrude. The only external space is the wilderness to which the father consigns the newborn child. In my film, I spread that chamber over an abandoned, claustrophobic city, and situate Nature as a defeated character outside it. Gower bases this tale on the letter of Canace to her brother Macareus from Ovid's *Heroides*. I have much to say about it, since it was the most difficult tale to film in terms of interpretation and realization, and the most difficult one for viewers to watch in its brutal treatment of a mother and child. As a scholar I can write dispassionately about the events of the story and their implications. As a filmmaker, all sorts of

sensations emerged as I put Gower's story together: sadness, distaste, keen awareness of contemporary feeling about child protection, technique, and an artist's discrimination. For these and other reasons I explain later, I omitted Gower's image, original to him, of the baby tumbling from Canace's lap as she impales herself, and for instinctive reasons I added a brief transparency of Eolus picking up his young daughter in affection. The former is the most famous scene in the tale, made especially horrible by Gower's lavish description of the baby rolling happily in its mother's warm blood, and the latter just isn't there: Eolus is monolithically indifferent to his children until Canace betrays him. She is strangely represented holding her vulnerable baby while she kills herself as though in parody of the parental indifference her father has shown.

Gower's "Canace and Machaire" has been the source of scrutiny for its treatment of the oppressive father who imprisons the bodies of his children and yet neglects them, and of course for the strangely lenient treatment of incest, a taboo Gower does not take lightly.[41] In fact, Book 8, devoted to the vice of lechery, opens with the abomination of incest and the examples Genius gives of its devastation. In this tale, Genius condemns the human presumption to defy

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41. For Gower's treatment of incest throughout the *Confessio Amantis*, see C. David Benson, "Incest and Moral Poetry in Gower's *Confessio Amantis*," *Chaucer Review* 19 (1984):100–109; Winthrop Wetherbee, "Constance and the World in Chaucer and Gower," in *John Gower: Recent Readings*, ed. R. F. Yeager (Kalamazoo: MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1989), 65–93; Georgiana Donavin, *Incest Narratives and the Structure of Gower's Confessio Amantis* (Victoria B.C.: English Literary Studies at The University of Victoria, 1993); A. C. Spearing, "'Canace and Machaire,"*Mediaevalia* 16 (1993): 211–21; María Bullón-Fernández, "Confining the Daughter: Gower's 'Tale of Canace and Machaire' and the Politics of the Body," *Essays in Medieval Studies: Proceedings of the Illinois Medieval Association* 11 (1994): 75–85; Bullón-Fernández, *Fathers and Daughters in Gower's* Confessio Amantis*: Authority, Family, State, and Writing* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000); Donavin, "Taboo and Transgression in Gower's 'Apollonius of Tyre'" in *Domestic Violence in Medieval Texts*, ed. Eve Salisbury, Georgiana Donavin and Merrall L. Price (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2002): 94–121; Diane Watt, *Amoral Gower: Language, Sex, and Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003); Matthew W. Irvin, *The Poetic Voices of John Gower: Politics and Personae in the* Confessio Amantis (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2014), 144–56.

("withdrawe") "what nature hath set in hir lawe," a quotation with which my film ends. Gower turns a cold eye later in the *Confessio* to sexual alliances that offend both *lex naturalis* and *lex positiva*, declaring that consanguineous intercourse was tolerated in the First Age when there were so few people to populate the earth. Canace and Machaire, given their circumstances, says Genius, likewise knew no "lawe positif," and coupled as humans did then. Georgiana Donavin, however, argues that Genius starts his development away from a mere pagan priest in Book 3, and in his counsel to Amans "does not see that Nature, as well as pagan law, would have repudiated a sibling alliance."[42] Even so, Eolus's rage against his daughter exceeds the boundaries of consanguinity, which dictate that even a judging father treat his child, no matter how errant, with some degree of kindness, a term that shares a root with *kynde*: the feeling that is "natural" of family members for each other. While incest is also grossly unnatural, Eolus's sin against nature is one of utter lack of nurture, pity, and love, and the matter of legal and moral culpability on all counts is a complex one here.

Of the three tales in this film, this one is my most visually realistic, and since the story seems especially directed at the importance of good governance, as well as good parenting, I dressed the character of Eolus as a turn-of-the-century Prussian aristocrat, a stern and uncompromising ruler. Gower embellishes the letter Canace writes to her brother in the *Heroides* with a fleshed out story vividly told and enacting the fate Ovid has his heroine predict, with two major changes: in the first instance, Ovid's account makes Aeolus, King of Winds, naturally angry, but we are not told that Canace and Macareus love each other because their father confined them together; in making this the case, Gower's Genius provides a forgivable reason for their incest. Eolus has "tuo children faire" whom he secludes from the rest of the world by

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42. Donavin, *Incest Narratives*, 35–36.

letting them grow up together in one chamber. When they come of "lusti age," Nature teaches them her "lore," the only sex education they receive, and infuses them with physical love for each other. These apparent innocents, like the bird who sees the food and "noght the net / Which in deceipte of him is set," (ll. 183–84) fear no *peril* (a word that whirls out the window in my film), but follow pleasurable instinct, and Kynde, garlanded and begowned in a forest setting, is depicted romantically as a woodland goddess who smiles on their sexual development. In the second instance, Canace in Ovid's version tries to abort the child with the help of her nurse, keeping her pregnancy secret from her brother until she writes to him. Gower, on the other hand, relieves Canace of this crime and burdens Machaire with a cowardly retreat. Despite their innocence, both seem to know the grave nature of their predicament: Canace hides her pregnancy from her father, and Machaire "feigneth cause for to ride," (l. 195) in fear that people will assume that "he his soster hath *forlein*" (l. 198 [my emphasis]).

This last word was hard to translate succinctly for the screen: the term itself has the intensifier *for-*, which suggests something more negative than just "lain with" (too quaint for a straightforward translation), and the most common meanings given in the *Middle English Dictionary* include "illicit" or "dishonorable sex," i.e., "fornication" or "rape." This is reinforced by Machaire's fear that he will be especially punished for taking the lead in deflowering his sister. Peck offers "robbed of virginity," much too long for a subtitle; "rape" was too strong and belied by the circumstances, and "fucked" too vulgar, so I chose "seduced." Again, I was constrained by the need to simplify the subtitles while expressing the resonating meanings of this verb, which raises the question of who has actually *forlein* whom. Interestingly, a second

meaning of the word is "to lie (on a child) so as to smother it."[43] Granted, it cannot have this meaning in Machaire's case, but there is reason to believe that such an action could be assigned obliquely to the father who has buried his children, forced his daughter to commit suicide, and had his henchman throw her newborn son to the beasts to devour. It is not farfetched to say that the siblings' incest could more directly extend to the father who literally made room for it. Gower gives no indication that Eolus himself had incestuous inclinations toward Canace, or any parental fondness at all for either of his children whom he sequesters from the rest of the world. But in my version, as I said, there is a transparent image in which a smiling Eolus lifts the child Canace up in his arms as though he favors her. I intended to suggest that Machaire has usurped the jealous father's intimate relationship with Canace, over whom he exerted a special dominance. So when Eolus finds out about his daughter's pregnancy, he falls into a *malencolie*, a word that is spelled in Middle English with *a* and *e* transposed in this way (instead of the French "melancholie": Gr. *melas* ["black"] *kholé* ["bile"] from which we get our modern word), but which even then was associated with sadness. In merging it with the Latin prefix *mal* (from *malus*, evil), it highlights that aspect of depression we understand as "dysphoric mania" in psychiatric parlance today, understood by medieval writers as irrational rage. Genius tells Amans that it is one of five servants to Wrath, and I depict his madness in the dizzying fast-forward through the tunnels of the city to find Canace, as though he is the god of the winds. Why, if he has so neglected his children, does Eolus react as he does, surely knowing that keeping his son

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43. The best examples given in the online *MED* include "That an womman had hir childe forlayne" (*Cursor Mundi*) and "I wolde my Moder mee hadde forleyn / Thee ferste day I was boorne to bee" (*Speculum Misericordie*). http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/m/mec/med-idx?type=byte&byte=60681910&egdisplay=compact&egs=60691803 (accessed October 26, 2014). The term might extend to killing a baby in general, which is certainly relevant in "Canace and Machaire."

and daughter together without proper access to society would lead to incest? Is it possible that he does not know? Or does he not care? Certainly both Machaire and Canace understand the legal repercussions of pregnancy out of wedlock: Machaire can escape because Canace has not revealed the paternity of the child: "For yit sche hadde it noght beknowe, / Whos was the child at thilke throwe" (ll. 199–200). In the absence of a father, then, it is possible that Eolus fears the folk "miht sein that he his *dohtor* hath forlein." This potential motive fills a lacuna that Gower leaves open: how madly the father pursues his daughter's punishment by commanding, but not enacting it, as if in eliminating her and her baby right away he intercepts all rumor that *he* is the father—by smothering it.

Eolus's tacit complicity with incest is reinforced by more explicit developments in the *Confessio* and other Middle English tales. Gower retells in Book 8 the famous story of father-daughter incest in "Apollonius of Tyre." The "Constance Saga" in other romances traditionally relates the plight of a daughter fleeing from her father's sexual attentions (a detail pointedly omitted by Chaucer's Man of Law); we find it in the Middle English Breton lay "Emaré"; and the daughter's fear in "Sir Degaré" that her pregnancy by a fairy lover will be attributed to her controlling father points to a keen concern in Middle English culture that paternity all too often oversteps its bounds. María Bullón-Fernández makes clear that the father traditionally controlled the body of his daughter, possessing and enclosing it until time to give it up to a husband's dwelling, an important threshold crossing that left the father "melancholy," a term Bullón-Fernández associates with love-longing as well as anger.[44] Romantically, "melancholy" is associated with loss and pining, whereas the rage it once denoted has been forgotten. Amans

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44. Bullón-Fernández,"Confining the Daughter," 79.

confesses to Genius that his evil/black humor was often inspired by jealousy and his lady's aloofness: "Sche seith me nay withouten oth; / And thus wexe I withinne wroth" (ll. 55–56). Amans cannot control the inclination of his beloved, and in more violent rage Eolus reasserts control over his daughter by making her commit suicide. Machaire has usurped the king as an object of devotion for Canace, if not his right to penetrate her, but Eolus chooses to have her pierce herself, despite creating the circumstances by which she commits the sin that enrages him. It is as though, writes A. C. Spearing, he is "proposing incest at a double remove, substituting the knight for himself and the sword for the phallus."[45] I reinforce that observation by showing the shadow of the swinging sword on the prison wall. This transference suggests to me that Eolus is distancing himself from blame by having no contact with her body at all. He refuses to *see* her until she is dead.

Strangely, no mention is made of Machaire by the father, as though Canace's greatest transgression is getting pregnant on her own. When she writes to her brother, she refers to *her* son, not theirs: "If that my litel sone deie, / Let him be beried in my grave / Beside me, so schalt thou have / Upon ous bothe remembrance" (ll. 292–95). Machaire has lost agency in this situation. In taking the sword and the pen Canace performs two significant acts of will that free her, writes Bullón-Fernández, to "define her life in her own terms,"[46] noting as well the substitution Gower makes of the letter that lies on her lap in Ovid with the baby that lies in her barm: both letter and baby are Canace's products, and evidence of the father's lack of parental and sexual control. The baby, at least, and all memory of it, must be destroyed, for it calls out as the letter does for commemoration. Canace begs her brother in the letter to bury the child with

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45. Spearing, "Canace and Machaire," 217.

46. Bullón-Fernández, "Confining the Daughter," 77.

her so that he at least can remember them. To the world, thanks to their father, they do not exist. It is not clear in either text that the letter even reaches Machaire, who has completely vanished from Gower's story. Eager to punish him for his cowardice (and determined to "show" rather than "tell"), I depict him in my film lying inert on a shabby bed, averting his eyes from the enormous letter hanging on the wall. Likewise, the king stands over the body of his daughter lying on the floor with her sword, and for a moment looks into the empty crib I provided for suspense: I wanted an audience unfamiliar with the story to think for a moment that Eolus would relent, so that I could hit them harder with the sadistic ending.

My film concludes with an untranslated quotation referencing a thorny critical problem: "What nature hath set in hir lawe / Ther mai no mannes miht withdrawe" (ll. 355–56). Genius makes this remark to Amans after the conclusion of the tale, inspiring debate about his leniency regarding incest. The matter of the siblings' legal culpability as fornicators and participants in incest is not something I portray completely, except that the dissonance felt by many scholars in Genius's protracted defense of their behavior is supported in the modern dress I give my characters. Since they look so well-tended in their 1912 clothing, flying together in blimps over a seemingly sophisticated city, how is it that they could not know that what they were doing was wrong? How would such a gross transgression of *lex positiva* have been punished in Gower's day?[47] I assumed that, being distanced from both the story and its present-day applications, a modern audience was probably more likely to sympathize with Canace and Nature, especially

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47. Peck asks the same question in his Plenary Talk, "The Materiality of Cognition": "How would she fare were she brought before the assize?" Irvin declares that Ovid in his *Heroides* (which Gower, he thinks, may have studied carefully), refers repeatedly to "Aeolus' legal and royal persona, and suggests that his decision is less unjust than Canace pretends" (*The Poetic Voices of John Gower*, 148–49).

since I manipulated that sympathy with my depiction of them: Canace is beautiful and frail, and Nature is young and garlanded, twirling happily in her glowing forest setting while she "assaileth the courage / With love" (ll. 154–55). In contrast, Eolus's reaction to the news is monstrous: we see him haloed by a blazing sun and, hearing the sound of the baby crying, he turns around mechanically like one of the robots in "The Forgotten City," his face a mask of rage. When he strikes her, our sympathies lie with Canace, in her white pajamas, falling to the floor. In Gower's text, it is not quite so simple. Irvin closely scrutinizes both Ovid's and Gower's versions, noting that in dramatizing Ovid's tale, Gower has lost Canace's "voice," along with the excuses she makes for herself in her letter to Macareus. Her confusion gets transferred, Irvin writes, to Genius, "a much larger creative choice than has previously been noted, especially in a narrative that totally depends upon the changing values of the speakers of the frame."[48] Having appropriated her voice, Genius "needs that pity in order to suggest that pity will balance wrath, but Gower (drawing on Ovid) prompts his readers to worry about the way in which pity relates to law and justice. Genius' appeal to pity thus travels with an incoherent use of 'natural law.'"[49]

Gower compensates by using a legal term to denote the father's punishment of the infant, the final outrage of the story. The king comes in to look at the corpse of his daughter and sees the baby lying in a pool of her blood:

> Bot al that mihte him noght suffise,
>
> That he ne bad to do juise
>
> Upon the child, and bere him oute,

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48. Irvin, 149.

49. Irvin, 149–50.

> And seche in the forest aboute
>
> Som wilde place, what it were,
>
> To caste him out of honde there. (ll. 321–26)

The pitiful images that would move any other heart could not prevent him (*mihte him noght suffise*) from casting judgment/sentence (*juise*) upon the child, as he had upon his daughter. Whether Genius should have cast judgment on Canace takes us down endless corridors of medieval law about incest, although Donavin is right to remind us that Gower is addressing a contemporary audience, and cannot afford to misadvise a nobleman about moral and lawful conduct.[50] In this tale, however, the final *felonie* is the cruel exposure of the newborn. It is important to advise a king about just and unjust *juise* and the consequences of not protecting what has been given to him to protect: "Let nevere thurgh thi Wraththe spille / Which every kinde scholde save" (ll. 342–43). I took "every kinde" to mean "every living species," as it does in Book 1, but with overtones of familial *kinde*:

> Fro this day forth I thenke change
>
> And speke of thing is noght so strange,
>
> Which every kinde hath upon honde,
>
> And wherupon the world mot stonde,
>
> . . . .
>
> And that is love. (ll. 9–12, 15)[51]

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50. Donavin, *Incest Narratives*, 38–39.

51. The word used in this sense has a long history, and of course gives us our modern noun "kind," meaning "class," "type," "category" and derives, as does L. *genus,* from the same Indo-European root that *kynde*, "nature," does: **gen*: "birth." See the *MED*, def. 9. Gower uses *kynde* as such in one other place in the *Confessio*: Book 1, l. 2826: "the kinde of alle briddes there." "Every kinde" here and in the Prologue warrants this interpretation because of the adjective

After a shot of the baby lying in the woods "where as no man him schal socoure" (l. 328), Nature returns in my film in a posture of despair, lying in the Wastelands with its dead trees and circling crows. All of them are smothered, prostrate, pressed down and *forlein* by the king whose lack of natural love bewilders even Genius, and whose voice, transferred to me, I transferred to Nature:

> Ha, who herde evere singe or rede
>
> Of such a thing as that was do?
>
> Bot he which ladde his wraththe so
>
> Hath knowe of love bot a lite. (ll. 330–33)

The heaviness of this story warranted a heavy setting, so I chose "The Forgotten City" by Jenne Dibou and Mandy Marseilles in Second Life, a claustrophobic, steampunk environment filled with narrow cobblestone streets, tunnels and canals, floating blimps, and stately, columned houses overshadowed by snaking ducts with valves. Through this city, Canace and Machaire wander, the only humans to inhabit it. The Town Square is dominated by the statue of an anonymous sentinel, reinforcing its air of aristocratic, military Europe. Everything about it is neglected-looking with its cracked cement walls and worn paving. Its status as "forgotten" matches the king's forgotten children, and his own forgotten humanity. The chamber they occupy is dimly lit, its regal austerity softened by the childish bed they share as children and lovers. The opening shot is framed again by the Plimpton manuscript margins, showing the two young people menaced by the wrought-iron gate hanging over them.

The most horrifying detail of the poem, and one that Gower spends considerable time describing, presented a challenge to me, and I want to take this opportunity to address those

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preceding it: "all kinds, every kind." This is not to say that "nature" does not inhere in these terms; these are not "kinds of equipment." But just as every natural species is governed by love, every natural species looks out for its own.

viewers who may regret its omission. What inhibited me was threefold: the artistic logic dictated by film, the technology dictated by my medium, and my own caution and taste:

> The pomel of the swerd to grounde
>
> Sche sette, and with the point a wounde
>
> Thurghout hire herte anon sche made,
>
> And forthwith that al pale and fade
>
> Sche fell doun ded fro ther sche stod.
>
> The child lay bathende in hire blod
>
> Out rolled fro the moder barm,
>
> And for the blod was hot and warm,
>
> He basketh him aboute thrinne. (ll. 307–15)

Gower here offers us a statuesque image that favors sensational impact over naturalistic movement. Dibou's city was tantalizingly realistic with its shadows and richly textured surfaces. Having already chosen a somewhat realistic setting and characters (the most realistic of all three films), I was reluctant to show the physically impossible. It threw me back into the alterity posed to viewers unfamiliar with the emblematic nature of medieval imagery—that bizarre Morgan illumination.

As a medievalist I have no objection to Gower's image; I am stirred by its drama. I even understand the artist's compressed reference to Ovid's picture of Canace with dagger in hand and letter on lap. As a filmmaker, however, I was hampered by the established verisimilitude of my representation and the logic it demanded—depicting Canace with sword in hand and *baby* in lap. Why would a woman who has written to her brother about caring for their son ("*if* he dieth") hold her infant son while committing suicide with a sword? Even if she knows that the child will

perish along with her, has she no maternal feeling for his little head as he falls to the floor? How can she carry him while she is bending over a sword the pommel of which she has set in the ground? That would cause her to stand, in which case there is no lap from whose support the child would fall. What Ovid presented as rhetorical, however, Gower turned into something visual and visceral for maximum impact, and it takes me back to my earlier remarks about film versions of poetry. Every shot in this film had to be carefully framed, but this tableau, and the movement it involved, was almost impossible.

Second Life has no satisfactory animation for a woman holding a newborn, much less one where it falls from its mother's lap.[52] I also assumed that Gower's gratuitous description of the baby basking happily in the warm blood of his mother—one of the great moments in the poem and meant to be pitiable, horrifying, and symbolic of the natural blood that attends birth— would repel contemporary viewers or, worse, make them laugh. Leaving it out was painful. So was representing it. As there was also no simple script for a baby tumbling to the floor, I compromised by having the infant-avatar lie on some spattered blood I set on the floor next to the blood-spattered crib to suggest that it had been removed from it. But we could not coat the avatar with blood to go with that dreadful line: "The king cam in the same throwe / And sih how that his dowhter dieth / And how this babe *al blody* crieth" (ll. 318–20).[53] I found blood galore to

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52. Friday Siamendes made the animation for me, which was a standing one as he grappled with the physics of committing seppuku with a sword. He made Canace guide the heavy thing with both hands, as would be natural. Again, machinima unlike traditional animation must deal with props, which obey the digital rules of the program, and there are few infant *props* in Second Life that do not have a sickly cuteness to them (pacifiers, cartoon faces). More often, for reasons too peculiar to explain, babies are animated the way an avatar is, since a number of users role-play as babies. So I had to enlist a fellow actor to "play" it.

53. In taking the shape of an infant in Second Life the other avatar has to wear an "alpha layer," a device that deforms the standard avatar shape by rendering it invisible and superimposing another shape on it. Nothing else can be imposed on it that shows up.

coat the dungeon floor with, and Canace's undergarment came with a gory version. But unless someone has designed a purchasable, naked, bloody baby in Second Life, which no one has, the filmmaker must do without.

I also feared being censured. Second Life puts few constraints on avatar behavior in its world, but its one proviso is that no adult/child sexual activity be enacted or represented. I assumed it extended as well to child abuse, and a machinima can have consequences for its filmmaker's privileges in Second Life. All these difficulties prevented me from recreating what Gower intended, which was not only a gruesome literalization of Ovid's poetic line, but a *pietà* of sorts that puts Canace in Mary's place, grieving over her dead son, and by implication Christ's place, killed by impious wrath. Every game engine has limiting factors that the machinima-tographer must work around, and the setting influenced my interpretation of events. It had become my own story, and in this context I did not like Gower's gory scene. Ironically, it was "unnatural" to me. It didn't fit the ambiance of Dibou's "Forgotten City," and I felt that a newer audience would find it extremely distasteful; so I put Nature prostrate in the Wastelands as a substitute for this wretched, cruelly-treated, bloody, forlain newborn baby.

The Tale of Florent, Book 1: ll.1407–1882

I was especially eager to include "Florent" in my triptych and end on a high note, since the previous tales are overwhelmingly grim. Also, Gower's "loathly lady" story has long been overshadowed by both Chaucer's "Wife of Bath's Tale" and *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*, so I wanted to give special homage to "Florent" and the final word. This rendition departs the most from the original tale, but it attempts to highlight Gower's humor in retaining the hints he gives of Florent's basic immaturity and his growth under the guidance of

women. It required a variety of spaces since its main character wanders in and out of dangerous territory, all of which I wanted to keep as unnatural as possible in order to conflict humorously with the modern clothing, vehicles, and props; and its animation is considerably more lively than the preceding films. Self-conscious about the sweepingly heteronormative content of this tale, I also kept its central question about what *all* women want a little more open to contemporary options: "What all women want is mastery over love." It is the only one of the three films that has no voice-over, except at the end, and its subtitles are a rhymed poem of my own, which vastly simplifies Gower's discourse in order to let the comic images tell the story.

Gower's tale falls under the aegis of Pride, and is here reduced to "murmur and complaint," itself a seemingly humorous dimension of the deadliest of sins. I say "seemingly" because debate about this tale has stressed its serious underpinnings. Distinctly *not* a courtly love story, the *Confessio* has been considered a receptacle for a prince's moral education, which is made clear in Book 1. Adopting the convention of a "Mirror for Princes," writes S. Elizabeth Passmore, it addresses the turbulent time in late fourteenth-century England when kings were badly in need of counseling.[54] Romantic love with its emphasis on lust has made love unnatural and shallow, and the world that "empeireth comunly" has fallen from order into ruin because of it. As Gower states in the Prologue: "The world is changed overal,/And therof most in special / That love is falle into discord" (ll.119–21). So too, actually, has honorable action, represented in Florent. Despite the glowing account Gower gives him at the beginning ("he was a worthi knyght"), his hero gets into brawls, allows his uncle to rescue him, avoids responsibility,

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54. S. Elizabeth Passmore, "Through the Counsel of a Lady: The Irish and English Loathly Lady Tales and the 'Mirrors for Princes' Genre,'" in *The English "Loathly Lady" Tales: Boundaries, Traditions, and Motifs*, ed. S. Elizabeth Passmore and Susan Carter (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), 3–41 (3).

complains about having to wed the woman who saved his life, and would prefer to fulfill his desire rather than obey. With a lighter brush, I made him a privileged member of a wealthy gang, the young nephew to his Mafia leader and in want of nothing: cool clothes, cool moves, eager women, and a fancy Italian motorbike. Gower's tale follows a long disquisition about "inobedience" and is surrounded by stories addressing hypocrisy, presumption, boasting, and vainglory, and I laid these faults heavily and humorously on my modern protagonist.

Most scholars assume a distant origin of the English Loathly Lady in the original Irish stories of the Sovereignty Goddess who advises the warrior who can embrace her hideous body how to become an effective king. In "Echtra mac Echdach Mugmedóin" (Adventures of the Sons of Eochaid Mugmedon), the transformed beauty tells Níall that just as a land is beset by war (and by implication poor governance) she is ugly and deformed, but lovely and youthful when it is at peace.[55] If Florent is constantly getting into fights, how can he contribute to the health of his nation? Despite the positive connotations attached to the terms "worthi" and "chivalrous," Gower's disapproval of his character is evident:

> Of armes he was desirous,
>
> Chivalerous and amorous,
>
> And for the fame of worldes speche,
>
> Strange aventures for to seche,
>
> He rod the marches al aboute. (ll. 1413–16)

Obsessively patrolling the borderlands in search of fame brings the youthful Florent into deadly contact with Branchus and the trial his family puts him to.

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55. See Maud Joynt's edition and translation of that poem ("Echtra mac Echdach Mugmedóin," *Eriu* 4 (1910): 91–111; cited and discussed by Passmore along with the other Níall poems in "Counsel of a Lady," 8–13).

The chronology of the story here falls into some confusion: The arrest is made before we learn who made it or why it was made, and the narrative attributes it to bad fortune:

> Fortune, which may every thred
>
> Tobreke and knette of mannes sped,
>
> Schop, as this knyht rod in a pas,
>
> That he be strengthe take was,
>
> And to a castell thei him ladde,
>
> Wher that he fewe frendes hadde.
>
> For so it fell that ilke stounde
>
> That he hath with a dedly wounde
>
> Feihtende, his oghne hondes slain
>
> Branchus, which to the capitain
>
> Was sone and heir, wherof ben wrothe
>
> The fader and the moder bothe. (ll. 1419–30)

The story does not say why Florent killed Branchus "that ilke stounde" and seems to cast a rapid glance back. This matter was important to me as it established Florent's culpability and the chronology of events in my film. Peck assumes the slaying was accidental,[56] and I followed suit, choosing the flashback and making it literally a vehicular accident—"until one fated day he was led away"—(push in on Florent in jail)—but noting as does Susan Carter that Florent "is at the onset a victim" of a passive construction (*take be strengthe*) in ironic contrast with his active

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56. Peck, "Folklore and Powerful Women in Gower's 'Tale of Florent'," in *The English "Loathly Lady" Tales*, ed. Passmore, et al., 100–45 (108): "When Florent accidentally slays Branchus, who "to the capitain / Was sone and heir" (I. ll.1428–30), his yearned-for encounter with women becomes immediately more threatening than anything he might have anticipated."

ostentation.[57] It is the beginning of a series of events that puts Florent increasingly under women's control, the first one being Fortuna herself.

It is a fortunate fall, though, because it sets him in a monomyth of perpetually confusing choices that will lead to his redemption—the impossibility of knowing what all women want, the need to decide between death for not answering correctly or life married to a revolting hag, and finally the choice set him by his transformed wife: enjoy her as a trophy in the day or as a desirable woman at night, but never both. Gower's portrayal of Florent's callow thought processes is delightfully funny in the following passage when he wracks his brains over the hag's initial offer:

> Now goth he forth, now comth agein,
>
> He wot noght what is best to sein,
>
> And thoghte, as he rod to and fro,
>
> That chese he mot on of the tuo,
>
> Or for to take hire to his wif
>
> Or elles for to lese his lif.
>
> And thanne he caste his avantage,
>
> That sche was of so gret an age,
>
> That sche mai live bot a while,
>
> And thoghte put hire in an ile,
>
> Wher that no man hire scholde knowe,
>
> Til sche with deth were overthrowe. (ll. 1569–80)

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57. Susan Carter, "A Hymenation of Hags," in *The English "Loathly Lady" Tales*, 83–99 (88).

Florent's selfish schemes to avoid being bound legally and physically to one of "th'unsemylieste women" of "alle kinde" humorously reveal his immaturity and belie the second pledge he makes. Putting her away is hardly a courageous act and completely undoes the lesson of the challenge. It also supports my portrayal of Florent as a child who has always relied on the easy out. Further, in a scene I omitted, Gower has Florent waffle hilariously in front of his female interlocutors when he returns, casting around in vain for a better answer than the one the Loathly Lady has given him:

> Florent seith al that evere he couthe,
>
> Bot such word cam ther non to mowthe,
>
> That he for gifte or for beheste
>
> Mihte eny wise his deth areste.
>
> And thus he tarieth longe and late,
>
> Til that this lady bad algate
>
> That he schal for the dom final
>
> Gif his ansuere in special
>
> Of that sche hadde him ferst opposed;
>
> And thanne he hath trewly supposed
>
> That he him may of nothing yelpe,
>
> Bot if so be tho wordes helpe,
>
> Whiche as the womman hath him tawht;
>
> Wherof he hath an hope cawht
>
> That he schal ben excused so,
>
> And tolde out plein his wille tho. (ll. 1641–56)

In a nine-minute film meant to round out a trio of grim lessons, I had to imply the above in a rapid sequence of images and vastly reduced subtitles. It was also set to a spritely score by Julian Boulier which gave it a fast pace. In order to lighten the story and make a choice about chronology and culpability, I have Florent kill Branchus off-screen in a loud, reckless motorcycle accident. We see him getting shakily to his feet while Branchus lies face down in the water surrounded by smoking vehicles. Florent is rescued by his influential uncle, next to whom he stands helplessly and gratefully, having expressed no remorse over Branchus's loss. Branchus's family are rival clans: the gangsterish father is willing to gun Florent down on sight but afraid of the repercussions ("They would've done him in if it wasn't for his kin"). So, as in the tale, their sly matriarch devises a challenge immune to the king's retaliation because it is external to the masculine activity of vengeance, dominated visually by the contract Florent is wheedled into signing: "For she could reel him in on the basis of his sin with one question."

Viewed in contemporary clothing, however, the story prompts us to ask what motivates this question about women. Florent's conflict with Branchus is a masculine conflict, but Branchus's family is dominated by a woman, reinforced in my film by her daughter and a granddaughter whom I made Florent's jilted girlfriend, certain that my contemporary audience would want a coherent reason for the grandmother's special punishment. Thomas Hahn writes that "[i]f the Loathly Lady looms less large in the plot of "Florent" [as opposed to her part in "The Wife of Bath's Tale" and "The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle"], Gower compensates by doubling her role" in the invention of Branchus' "grantdame."[58] I intended to oppose her to the Loathly Lady. Like her, the grantdame is a shapeshifter, but far more *eldritch*

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58. Thomas Hahn, "Old Wives' Tales and Masculine Intention," in *Retelling Tales*, ed. Thomas Hahn and Alan Lupack, 91–108 (101).

in her witch form than the hag Florent must marry: while the Loathly Lady is comic in her childish bridal outfit, staring up approvingly at her reluctant husband, I make the grantdame death-white and hideous in her parody of a wedding gown. She and her family sit in a virtual replica of the Iron Throne in *Game of Thrones*® next to a dead green sea.[59] The Loathly Lady is also associated with a metallic land, but one that is dynamic and moving, and the one that Florent ultimately inherits at the end of my film.

However, unless we remember its origins in the Irish sovereignty tales (most likely forgotten by both Gower and Chaucer), we do not readily see the connection between Lady and Land, or Queen and Counsel. Scholars make much greater sense of the story than Genius makes of it to Amans. My fear in making the film was that modern viewers would discount it as a tepidly feminist text, with Florent's brothers giving him specious advice about what all women want. Unless we see "The Tale of Florent" as a cautionary story about patiently following Sovereignty's advice, the story seems to lack a center, and Genius a point. Where, I wondered, was the demonstration of disobedience in this tale? Florent is admirably obedient in every respect. It is as though Genius, by way of Gower, got hold of a "cronique" that he liked (l.1404) and fused it unnaturally with the lesson he intended.[60] For in what way does Florent murmur and complain about his "good" fortune in having of love "al that [he] wolde crave" (l. 1362)? Unlike

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59. A critic (going by the name "machine cinema") directed me to his article on the Russian site VK about my film, noting that "Florent" references pop culture images, another layer of remediation: "Scarface" as Branchus's father, and the throne from HBO series *Game of Thrones*: https://vk.com/machine_cinema (accessed November 24, 2014). I would add the Loathly Lady as a kind of Baba Yaga, with an ax instead of a pestle.

60. Hahn notes that the term "cronique" occurs in the latest version of the *Confessio*, whereas earlier versions (he references Macaulay's edition, vol. 1, p.74) supplied the word "tale" ("And in ensample of this matiere / A tale I fynde as thou shalt hiere"), remarking that "[t]his revision transforms the pedigree of Gower's retelling from popular tale . . . to literate narrative" ("Old Wive's Tales," 100).

Amans whose beloved tells him to go love another (something anyone deeply in love would resent), Florent believes that he has chained himself to a wretched "mone" who crudely forces her unwanted desire on him. This is not good fortune for Florent until she transforms. Between his killing Branchus and his ceding his choice to his wife, Florent is a passive player caught between the public and private challenges given him by two fierce women—one who holds the contract and the other who holds the ax. And yet we like Florent. So too, I think, did Gower, who tortured him fondly and gave me license to torture him even more so.

Chaucer solves the problem in "The Wife of Bath's Tale" by making his knight a rapist, an unsympathetic character who is lucky in being given a chance to redeem himself with women. By changing the terms of the challenge the Loathly Lady poses, Chaucer further offers him a chance on his wedding night to learn the Christian moral of fidelity versus appearance: choose to have her "ugly and faithful" or "beautiful and unfaithful"—this last reflecting his initial condition, using public honor to hide private lack of honor. Dame Ragnelle follows Gower in the choice set to the knight: choose to have her "fair by day and foul by night" or the other way around. The latter may seem to be a less serious choice, lust versus vanity, but in "Florent" it more subtly illustrates the moral that Yeager sees Gower posing: the central tension in "Florent" is whether the hero will follow the inner voice of conscience, abandoning the outer show of strength.[61]

There is no voice in my "Florent" until the very end. It is all rhymed subtitles. Also it is the most stylized of my three tales—frames are everywhere: Florent confidently crosses the threshold of his frame at the beginning; people get pushed out of the frame of the film;

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61. R. F. Yeager, "The Politics of *Strengthe* and *Vois* in Gower's Loathly Lady Tale," in *The English "Loathly Lady" Tales*, ed. Passmore, et al., 42–72.

Branchus's death-white grandmother addresses her question to Florent in front of a frame around her angry, pouting granddaughter. I set the tale in two principal environments: "The Virtual Pardoner," my island devoted to Chaucer's character, the ground of which is textured with a medieval manuscript, and the build by the Spencer Museum of Art at the University of Kansas that depicts the popular Petrovsky Flux mentioned earlier. I received permission from artist Janine Portal to use one of the paintings she exhibits in Second Life, "Oracle," as a prominent background for my scenes. It depicts an eerie, snake-like woman, much like Melusine flying from the ramparts of her castle, her arms turning into the branches of trees. For me she functions as distorted "Nature," as "Metamorphosis," and as the frightening power of the Feminine that both threatens and guides Florent's adventures, until she is replaced by the Petrovsky Flux at the end of the film. Florent's world prior to that is a paper world; he walks, dances, and rides his motorcycle on a manuscript. He is himself an elegant text, wearing a tattoo of words that announce his self-perceived virility; "Desire," prominently displayed on his throat, turns what should be inward outward in a colorful display of machismo. It is not only central to the two

challenges put to him, but reflects what Peck calls "the masculine syntax embodied on its hero."[62] There are few interiors except for the church: furniture and props are set against this textual landscape because no one in this world builds anything until after Florent has given the choice to his bride.

Meanwhile, the Petrovsky Flux with its menacing machinery provides the perfect backdrop for Florent's ejection from this garden of words. Besides the nuts, bolts, and automatism, the collapsing environment is full of flying paper, as though Florent's text is coming apart. Visually, it is also an emblem of the unnaturalness of the condition he's put in: the marriage of youth and "elde." It is here that he meets the ax-wielding Lady in her workers' overalls and this is her Land that Florent will inherit if he can grow up: difficult, harsh, dangerous, and unpredictable, and far more of a challenge than the sterile world of iron thrones and fancy dresses. She is blue-collar, mannish, and vulgar—the opposite of the essentialized, aristocratic bride as well as the freakish witch—and instead of portraying her as grotesquely hideous I made her merely disfigured and disheveled. Being a female mechanic, she is indifferent to the falling objects that sweep poor, vulnerable Florent off his feet. When he first meets her under her metallic tree, she is chopping wood, a foreshadowing of Florent's potential death. He helps her split the log, this act of generosity expressing his essential goodness and his impulse, later on, to keep his troth in "th' onour of womanhiede."

When he finally cedes that choice to her is when I used the voice-over to express his finding a voice. In my film, it was a pivotal moment where he admits to the poor decisions he has made all his life: his recklessness, his sheltering behind his uncle, his rude behavior at his wedding: "I can noght miselve gesse / Which is the beste unto my chois" (ll. 1826–27). I

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62. Peck, "Folklore and Powerful Women in Gower's Tale of Florent,"108.

translated this as "All my guesses are disasters." At this point, too, he loses his tattoos, and is therefore completely naked when he confesses to her, turning what is merely written on his body into words he speaks—his "hole vois." She is to him what Genius is to Amans. Instead of making her reveal the details of the curse he has lifted in giving her agency, I make her choose to be a mechanic again, this time young and lovely, and fix his damaged motorcycle. The film ends with their building a house together while the collapsing structures of the Petrovsky Flux are reversed, lifting up to join the tree they fell from, and amending, too, a political and moral structure that has collapsed in the other tales in this film. It is an ending as well to the triptych by reestablishing *kynde* as a positive cultural force, a young couple having found their own kind and building their own framework, and my credits end with a return to the tableau (both the virtual and original framed illustration in MS Bodleian 902, fol. 8r) of Amans confessing to Genius.

Conclusion

As I contemplate "the use of antiquity as example for the future," my hope is that both the film and my examination of it here can benefit education as well as entertain, reaching more students than my classroom can hold, and finding, perhaps, other colleagues willing to experiment with creative forms of critical response. I think it important to bring medieval English to life again by uttering and performing it, something I have always striven to teach my students. Despite the distraction of subtitles, choosing to narrate this film in Middle English was one of the best decisions I made. So was getting rid of the "look" of the Middle Ages and concentrating on its

palimpsestuousness," a term attributed to Michael J. Alexander and often repeated academically and popularly.[63]

The palimpsest is a remediated page, the old ink scraped off the parchment and new ink laid on top. But in adaptation theory it has come to mean the trace left by the original that is still visible after you have adapted it, such that space in a 3D virtual world can put in motion what was painted on a flat surface long ago. The machinima contests in Second Life challenge us to remediate a virtual object or landscape by imposing a new story upon it in a film, at the same time keeping the original, like the Petrovsky Flux, recognizable. Using the "stories" told by the artwork in Second Life, I can do the same to a tale by Gower, who adapted older tales to new uses. Gower did not insist, as did Chaucer, on a realistic depiction of his characters, which relieved me from having to portray them as medieval characters. I could focus on the idea of them as did his illustrator who put old stories in new dress. I wanted my film to be faithful enough to be recognizable as a Gower tale, and to diminish the distance between the failures of human nature that concerned him and those that trouble us today.

This film thus engages in a double remediation in that I also want viewers to appreciate my creative use of other people's work, which contributed significantly to its visual power. Second Life, in not being a game with rules and pre-designed environments, provides an ideal parchment for these adaptations. Its special form of machinima may actually be in decline, given its expense and the difficult access to life-like animations. It is largely overlooked by scholars of game media, the term "machinima" itself overwhelmingly associated with YouTube's multi-channel network *Machinima*®, which not only coopted the word as its site name, but up through

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63. Michael J. Alexander, *The Poetic Achievement of Ezra Pound* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1979), 144; Hutcheon, *Adaptation*, 21, et passim; Kline, *Digital Gaming*, 5.

2013 was baldly self-identifying on its page as "a programming movement aimed at young males."[64] The term as it applies to these sandbox virtual worlds needs to be replaced by "Real Time Animation" so that it can be seen as a subgenre of *all* animation.

I hope, through this long disquisition, I have made it clear how Second Life is a venue for wildly imaginative remediation, offering a manuscript matrix as a generative source for story and its own palimpsestuous intertextuality and alterability. In being virtual, it leaves traces of what it submits to remediation: textures on virtual blankets taken from photos of actual blankets; murmuring streams or bird calls that are recordings of actual streams and birds. My focus on *Kynde* and *Natura* in these tales by Gower derives, perhaps, from my own fascination with artifice and mimicry, and Second Life is a world of artifice punctuated by moments that are natural. When two avatars meet and open up their voice apparati by means of Vivox (Second Life Skype), they can hear each other talk, "in that ilke stound," even if one is in Rochester, New York and the other in Australia. These are not virtual voices. They speak across boundaries. Gower speaks to us across time, just as Ovid and other ancients spoke to Gower. Making this machinima was my attempt to speak for Gower, not just to Gower scholars but to viewers who could become familiar with his work and the vitality of Middle English language and literature. In the freedom it allowed me to move within it, Second Life is the "imaginary world" that best suited my purposes.

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64. See www.machinima.com (accessed November 24, 2014). It has very recently removed that offensive description, demonstrating that women participate in gaming too: http://www.dailydot.com/entertainment/machinima-female-gamers-audience/ (accessed November 24, 2014). Even so, of the short, experimental art animations that many film contests like to exhibit, fewer are machinima, as was noted at Machinima Expo 7 (January 23, 2014), probably because fewer people are submitting them. (Panel discussion: "Is Machinima in Decline?" Panelists: Ricky Grove, Glenn Saunders, Tracy Harwood, Geoff Casavant, John Norton, and Phil Browne.)

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