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Preface

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Preface

Acknowledgments
We express our admiration for the local organizer of the Third International Congress of the John Gower Society, Russell Peck, whose abounding energy, brilliance, and foresight contributed not only to a well-structured and stimulating conference, but also to the perpetuation of such forward-looking projects as Sarah L. Higley's, which we are publishing here.

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Preface

We are delighted to dedicate this special issue of *Accessus* to the work of medievalist and machinimatographer, Sarah L. Higley,[1] whose adaptations of three of John Gower's tales from his English work, the *Confessio Amantis*, capture the journal's focus on new media remediation of premodern literatures and offer our readers a multidimensional viewing experience of Gower's poetry. Entitled *The Lover's Confession*, Higley's film premiered at the Third International Congress of the John Gower Society held at the University of Rochester (30 June— 3 July, 2014) in an evening dedicated to creative approaches to Gower's work. Shown that night to an audience made up primarily of Gower scholars, the film was enthusiastically received and acclaimed for its innovations. Stories that many of us have understood only from manuscript and print copies were suddenly brought to life in Second Life. We would like to share that experience with an audience that includes not only Gower scholars but creative artists, animators, new media specialists, and interested others by re-presenting the work here and providing hyperlink access to the virtual worlds Higley has constructed for our pleasure and edification (just click on

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1.Sarah L. Higley (whose *nom de plume* is Hypatia Pickens) is a Professor of English at the University of Rochester where she teaches medieval literature and language—Old English, Middle English, and Welsh—as well as film. Her scholarly credits include an essay collection (with Jeffrey Andrew Weinstock): *Nothing That Is: Millennial Cinema and the Blair Witch Controversies* (Detroit: Wayne State, 2004); *Hildegard of Bingen's Unknown Language: An Edition, Translation, and Discussion* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); *Between Languages: The Uncooperative Text in Early Welsh and Old English Poetry* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1993), and numerous articles in medieval literature, film, and popular culture. Her creative credits include "Textcavation," available on YouTube https://www.youtube.com/user/textacavation and several machinima based on medieval topics, including *KAPHD* (2011, about Hildegard of Bingen), *Wulf and Eadwacer*, which won a juried award at the 5th Annual machinima Expo, 2012, and "Finding the Experimental in Machinima," a documentary in the style of a video-poem. *The Lover's Confession*, her presentation at the Third International Congress of the John Gower Society, has recently won the grand prize at the 7th Annual Machinima Expo.

the Vimeo or YouTube links below the first image or on the essay's homepage). We recommend viewing the film before reading the essay.

In Higley's essay critical readings of the three tales refashioned in the film offer an analytical dimension to the visuals, bringing poetry, music, and motion together in innovative ways. The first part of Higley's two-part analysis explores theories of adaptation, notions of the frame, and the new meanings possible in cinépoetic video-poems. The second part provides a reading of each of the three tales—"The Tale of the Travelers and the Angel," "The Tale of Canace and Machaire," and "The Tale of Florent"—making connections between their original and remediated forms. Each explication delineates the film's fidelity to and departure from Gower's narratives, encouraging us to think of the *Confessio Amantis* as a provocative and multifaceted enterprise. Love is not an uncontested category of relationship in this remediation, but complicated when Nature (known by Gower as *kynde*) is declared unnatural in some way. What holds true for Gower's time continues to be problematic in our own: not everything can be said or illustrated explicitly. Higley's explanation of what can and cannot be visually rendered in Second Life, especially in relation to Canace's suicide and Gower's description of a child sitting in a pool of blood, reminds us that there are guidelines for images deemed too pornographic or violent for their audiences.

Each of the tales in Higley's film takes us into a world that Gower himself is likely to have appreciated; her importation, remediation, and adaption of the three tales of the *Confessio* are consistent with his importation, remediation, and adaptation of classical works: his "Tale of Canace and Machaire" has its source in Ovid's *Heroides*, for instance. Those who experience pleasure in reading Gower's stories, whether silently or aloud, are likely to redouble that experience in the virtual environments Higley has constructed. Exotic characters lure us into

otherworldly spaces replete with decadent *objets d'art* and surreal Dali-esque assemblages, all set into undulating motion; we are simultaneously carried away and moved by the characters and environments that Higley has reimagined and transported through space and time. Linear chronology seems to collapse in these virtual worlds in ways not perceptible in written texts: history becomes the present, always-already there, contemporary and timeless. This is not an anachronistic or uninformed remediation of the Middle Ages, but rather an adaptation that expresses Gower's philosophy of "writings of the past as exempla for the future."[2] History, as Gower understands it, is a fragmented story, one whose reassembled pieces bring the past into conversation with the present. As Higley writes, "Gower speaks to us across time."

When we understand the past to be prologue as Shakespeare does so readily in *The Tempest*, Gower's visionary abilities, his prophetic futurism, are not only rendered visible, but audible as well; objects float, eyes inhere in nonhuman forms, and a disembodied voice speaks in Middle English. To say merely that Higley's film is stunning is not sufficient to capture what has been accomplished in her blending of new media and medieval manuscripts. Each piece is narrated in the cadences of Gower's poetry or accompanied by superimposed text and music. Snapshot illustrations interspersed throughout the essay capture pivotal scenes in the film. Two of the most captivating images of "The Tale of Florent," for instance, feature a motorcycle-riding protagonist emerging from a landscape made of manuscript pages and Gower's loathly lady, dressed as a mechanic in workers' overalls, morphing into the perfect fantasy wife. The merging of manuscript matrices and cinépoetic techniques have made for an artfully mobile assemblage well suited to a new media e-journal where the remediation of premodern poetry can be

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2."*Scripture veteris capiunt exempla future*," line 1, *Vox Clamantis*, vol. 4. In *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 4 vols. Ed. G. C. Macaulay (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1902), 20.

actualized. Higley's provocative machinima and critical readings of these three tales urge us to

think and feel, to hear and see Gower's poetry anew.

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