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GOWER'S *TALE OF FLORENT* AND CHAUCER'S *WIFE OF BATH'S TALE*: A STYLISTIC COMPARISON

There seems to be almost general agreement among critics of Gower's and Chaucer's poetry that 'Gower is not on a level with Chaucer'.¹ Although Gower's style is praised for its natural and unaffected quality, it is at the same time considered to be rather plain, prosaic and undramatic;² Burrow goes even further when he states that it often comes 'dangerously close to sheer hebetude and dullness'.³ Gower's use of language in the *Tale of Florent* seems to justify this opinion, especially when contrasted with Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*. These two authors derived their tale from a common ancestor,⁴ but their treatment of it is completely different. This is mainly due to their adaptation of the tale to the respective narrators, i.e. the Confessor and the Wife of Bath, whose motives for telling the tale are of a rather different nature. The Confessor's tale serves as an illustration to show how 'obedience in love availeth':⁵ obedience in a lover is a virtue which will ultimately be rewarded. The tale is designed to convince the lover of the importance of obedience even in the most difficult circumstances. The Wife, in her tale, places the emphasis not on the obedience of the knight/lover but on the question 'what thyng is it that women moost desiren'.⁶ The tale is meant to show that every woman wants to have 'maistrie' over her lover or husband. The obedience of the lover/husband is here only important in so far as it gives Woman the opportunity to rule over him.

The Wife of Bath is personally very much involved in her tale because it gives substance to her own inmost desire.⁷ For the Confessor, the tale is only an *exemplum*: it shows the usefulness of obedience in love but no more. The

¹ G. C. Macaulay in A. W. Ward & A. R. Waller (eds.), *Cambridge History of English Literature*, Vol. II. (Cambridge, 1912), p. 151.

² See e.g. W. P. Ker, *Essays on Medieval Literature* (London, 1905), p. 108; C. S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love* (London, 1936), pp. 201, 222; H. S. Bennett, *Chaucer and the Fifteenth Century* (Oxford, 1948 repr.), p. 83; D. Pearsall, 'Gower's Narrative Art', *PMLA*, 81 (1966), 475, but cf. Pearsall in his *Old English and Middle English Poetry* (London, 1977), p. 208; N. Gilroy-Scott, 'John Gower's Reputation: Literary Allusions from the Early Fifteenth Century to the Time of Pericles', *The Yearbook of English Studies*, 1 (1971), 30-47; but cf. P. Fison, 'The Poet in John Gower', *Essays in Criticism*, 8 (1958), 16-26.

³ J. A. Burrow, *Ricardian Poetry* (London, 1971), p. 29.

⁴ According to most critics, cf. S. Eisner, *A Tale of Wonder, a Source Study of the Wife of Bath's Tale* (Wexford, 1957), pp. 65, 70-1; K. Malone, 'The Wife of Bath's Tale', *Modern Language Review*, 57 (1962), 481; J. H. Fisher, *John Gower* (London, 1965), p. 371, note 31.

⁵ See John Gower, *The Confessio Amantis* Bk I, 1401, in G. C. Macaulay, *The Complete Works of John Gower*, Vol. II (Oxford, 1901). All other references are to Macaulay's edition.

⁶ See Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Tale*, line 905, in F. N. Robinson, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (London, 1957, 2nd ed.). All other references are to this edition.

⁷ Cf. the *Prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale* in which the Wife of Bath's main concern is to gain mastery over her husbands, see especially lines 811-25.

Confessor has no *personal* interest in any of the characters, only in the moral of the tale.

It is not surprising that the diverse aims of the two narrators coupled with the disinterestedness of the Confessor and the personal involvement of the Wife of Bath influenced the treatment of the original tale. In each case the source tale has been adapted to their specific purposes.⁸ Changes have been made in the content and the setting of the tale and in the formal outlines of the tale, i.e. in the narrative structure and the language. Although the language used in both tales is of a colloquial nature,⁹ there are clear differences, which have to be linked up with all the above mentioned factors. Below, I will briefly compare the two tales in order to show how the intrinsic qualities of content and structure are reflected in the language texture, and then proceed to set the Wife's tale against the Confessor's to bring out their stylistic differences, which will be the main purpose of this study.¹⁰ An attempt will also be made to evaluate these differences in the light of the different intentions of the narrators.¹¹

First of all let us consider the setting of the two tales. The Wife of Bath gives hers a romantic setting (albeit tinged with irony¹²) by placing the event in the days of King Arthur when fairies still roamed the country.¹³ Both tales contain fairy-tale-like details, but in the Wife's tale they are surrounded by an aura of mystery which is lacking in the Confessor's tale. In the Wife's tale the four and twenty ladies dancing in the wood, whose presence is not accounted for, suddenly disappear, after which the knight encounters the old woman who seems to have replaced them all of a sudden; also, none of the characters is named.¹⁴

⁸ Fisher, *Gower*, p. 296, believes that Chaucer knew Gower's tale and that he consciously adapted it.

⁹ Many of the examples in M. Schlauch's article, 'Chaucer's Colloquial English: its Structural Traits', *PMLA*, 47 (1952), 1103-16, on colloquial features in Chaucer's language are taken from the *Wife of Bath's Tale*. Of the colloquial traits she discusses, a fair number are also found in Gower's tale. R. W. V. Elliott, *Chaucer's English* (London, 1974), too, illustrates many of his colloquialisms with examples taken from the Wife's tale. Everett, 'Chaucer's Good Ear' in D. Everett, *Essays on Middle English Literature* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 145-7, mentions that we are given the impression that the Wife of Bath is actually talking. As far as Gower is concerned, he himself mentioned that he wished to use an informal style for his *Confessio Amantis*, see Bk VIII, 3062-9.

¹⁰ Gower's tale (including the final remarks made by the Confessor and Amant) covers 468 lines and Chaucer's tale (including the Wife's benediction) 407 lines. This means that the two tales are almost ideally comparable as far as length is concerned, since Chaucer's smaller number of lines is more than compensated for by the use of longer lines (by one foot); Chaucer's tale is in fact slightly longer.

¹¹ I have already indicated that both Chaucer and Gower adapted the original tale to their respective narrators. In how far the narrators are also the mouth-pieces of the authors is not relevant for the present (I will come back to this in my conclusion). It must be evident, however, that the Confessor is a much more reliable narrator with respect to Gower's views than the Wife of Bath is with respect to Chaucer's.

¹² By stating, for instance, that limiters and other holy friars have frightened away the fairies, lines 873-81.

¹³ According to Eisner, *A Tale of Wonder*, p. 71, this is original. Even if it is not, Chaucer still made a positive choice in retaining it, whereas Gower changed it.

¹⁴ Other fairy-tale or romance-like elements are: (1) the respite of *twelf-month and a day* (line 909). Although in origin a legal term, it was often used as a time-span in Celtic myths, and via myth

The Confessor's tale is much more matter-of-fact. There is no fairy-tale setting — this in spite of the fairy-tale elements present (see below). The main character is a realistically drawn individual, provided with a name, family and rank.¹⁵ The old woman in the Confessor's tale has not been turned into a mysterious creature, because the narrator has created her to serve as a mere tool in the moral structure of the tale. After the knight has shown his obedience, he is rewarded for it by her change from an ugly old hag into a beautiful maiden. The change itself is fairy-tale-like but not the way in which it is handled in the tale: the reader is given a rather prosaic explanation of it.¹⁶ The Wife of Bath does not explain the old hag's transformation at all. According to Eisner, this is omitted so as not to disturb the veil of mystery.¹⁷ There is also a personal reason, I think, for the Wife of Bath to leave it out: such an explanation would be damaging to her intentions; the old woman, like any woman, wanted 'maistrerie' for herself, not because a stepmother made her ask for it.

The variations in the narrative framework also bring out the different qualities of the two tales. The main elements in the story are the capture of the knight, the interference of the queen (in Chaucer)/the 'grantdame' (in Gower), the meeting with the old woman in the wood, and the bed episode after the knight and the 'loathly lady' have been married. These elements are present in both the Confessor's and the Wife's tale, but they are arranged differently. In the Wife's tale the arrangement of events works towards more suspense, more intensity and therefore a more effective climax. In the Confessor's tale there is much less tension and no real climax because he passes over almost every opportunity to provide it. Compare, for instance, the placement in the tales of the reward the old hag asks the knight for services rendered. In the Confessor's tale the old woman offers Florent her help and tells him immediately what she expects from him in return. We also hear at once what the solution to the riddle is. The Wife of Bath's knight eagerly accepts the services of the old woman, but he does not realize yet what is in store for him. The answer to the riddle is not given us, for the old woman 'rowned ... a pistel in his ere / And bad him to be glad, and have no fere' (1021-2); we have to wait for the answer till the knight arrives at the queen's court.¹⁸

There is no need to go into an exhaustive discussion of all the differences in

in romances, see H. R. Patch, *The Other World* (Cambridge, Mass., 1950), p. 43; cf. also *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, where Gawain is allowed 'A twelmonyth and a day' (line 297 in J. R. R. Tolkien's and E. V. Gordon's edition, Oxford, 1925) before he has to receive the return blow; (2) the unspecified location of the knight's quest: he goes to every coast, every house, every place (lines 912-22), whereas Florent goes only and specifically to his uncle's house (line 1489).

¹⁵ See Gower, lines 1407-17.

¹⁶ See Gower, lines 1841-52.

¹⁷ Cf. Eisner, *A Tale of Wonder*, p. 65.

¹⁸ Notice that in Gower again the emphasis is on the knight's obedience. The narrator has not left us in any doubt about his performance in this respect. The old woman trusts Florent — she does not accompany him to the castle, as does the old woman in Chaucer — and we feel she is right in trusting him because of the information we have already been given about the knight's character (lines 1435-6, 1472, 1511-13 etc.). In contrast to this, we have only negative information about the 'worthiness' of Chaucer's knight (lines 885-8).

arrangement of the story elements. They have already been worked out in detail by other critics.¹⁹ It is enough for my purpose to mention only a few additional characteristic arrangements in the narrative frameworks of both tales, which are illustrative of the narrators' intentions.

Another way of developing more tension and suspense is the technique of causing intentional delay. In the Wife's tale the knight's quest before the meeting with the old hag covers many more lines than in the Confessor's tale²⁰ — not least because of the great many interruptions of the Wife of Bath herself, including the story about Midas' wife. We are told that he travels to every possible place on earth to find out what women most desire. Florent only goes to his uncle's court. When he is not successful there, he immediately returns to the enemies' castle. Delay is also achieved by the insertion of the 'sermon' on 'gentillesse' given by the old woman in the marriage bed in the Wife's tale, even though this sermon does not play a direct part in the plot.

The Wife's interruptions, mentioned above, are also interesting from another point of view. They reveal her deep, personal interest in the story. The Wife of Bath cannot refrain from giving comments in the course of her tale.²¹ She also often identifies herself with the characters in the tale. A very good illustration of this is the following, often quoted passage, where she does this very subtly,

920 He seketh every hous and every place
 Where as he hopeth for to fynde grace,
 To lerne what thyng wommen loven moost;
 But he ne koude arryven in no coost
 Wher as he myghte fynde in this mateere
 Two creatures accordyng in-feere.
 925 *Somme seyde wommen loven best richesse,*
 Somme seyde honour, somme seyde jolynesse,
 Somme riche array, somme seyden lust abedde,
 And of tyme to be wydwe and wedde.
 Somme seyde that oure hertes been moost esed
 930 Whan that *we* been yflatered and yplesed.
 He gooth ful ny the sothe, *I* wol nat lye.
 A man shal wyne *us* best with flaterye; (919-32) (italics mine)

Because of the constant repetition of *somme seyde*, one hardly notices that she changes from *wommen* to *us* ('oure hertes'), culminating in a very personal comment in the first person (931). After this she goes on for another eighteen lines telling the readers what women want (that is, what *she* wants) and what they are like, finishing up with an exemplum from Ovid about king Midas' wife. The Confessor, on the other hand, never 'butts in' at all, only at the end

¹⁹ See e.g. F. G. Townsend, 'Chaucer's Nameless Knight', *Modern Language Review*, 49 (1954), 1-4; Eisner, *A Tale of Wonder*; Malone, 'Wife of Bath's Tale'; T. Silverstein, 'Wife of Bath and the Rhetoric of Enchantment; or How to Make a Hero See in the Dark', *Modern Philology*, 58 (1961), 153-73.

²⁰ Chaucer, lines 913-88, Gower, lines 1485-1514: thus it covers nearly one fifth of the total poem in Chaucer and roughly one fifteenth in Gower.

²¹ Personal comments of the Wife of Bath are found e.g. in lines 862-81, 893, 979-82, 983, 1073-9, 1257-end.

of his tale does he draw the appropriate moral (after he has first left this task to 'impersonal' clerks (1856-61). There his personal view stands out for the first time (1862-4).

The personal involvement of the Wife of Bath as a woman (the 'maistrie' motif) also influences the way other women are presented in her tale (see also below). Both knights have committed a crime. The crime of the Wife of Bath's knight is so serious that he is condemned to death. This is prevented by the 'maistrie' the queen and other ladies have over the king. They persuade the king to give the knight to the queen to do with him what she wants.²² Thus the queen acquires 'maistrie' over the knight. In the Confessor's story, Florent, the knight, has accidentally killed another man. His captors want him dead but dare not kill him because of his high rank and his family ties with the emperor. The 'grantdame' the knight is committed to has nothing in common with the teller of the tale, the Confessor, nor has she any *personal* interest in Florent; all she wants is his death. This explains the very different reactions of the queen and the grantdame after the knight has given the correct answer to the riddle: the queen and the other women are happy that he saved his life (1043-5), the grantdame is highly upset (1657-62). In the Wife of Bath's tale there is one theme that connects all the characters. The mastery motif links the Wife of Bath with the queen and the old hag: they all want 'maistrie';²³ it also binds the king to the queen, the knight to the queen and the knight to the old hag, in the *exercise* of 'maistrie'. Thus the Wife of Bath's personal interest remains strong throughout the tale; there is a close affinity between the teller and the characters in the tale. This is not present in the Confessor's tale because of his lack of interest in the characters themselves. *They* are not important, the moral consequences of the tale are.

Still on the level of narrative structure but coming closer to the linguistic level, we find another device leading to greater intensity and liveliness, the use of direct speech. The Wife of Bath does not often *describe* dramatically important moments, she *enacts* them.²⁴ When we look at the number of lines containing direct speech in both tales, there is not a great deal of difference, if we leave out of account the sermon on gentility, which is all direct speech. The Wife of Bath's tale has a total of 110.1 lines of direct speech (917 words); this is nearly one third of her story (total number of words excluding sermon is 2612). The Confessor's tale has 113.7 lines of direct speech (725 words), which amounts to almost one quarter of the total number of 2984 words. Far more important than the quantity of lines in direct speech are the exact moments when direct speech is used and the 'quality' of these lines. If the speeches in the two tales are compared in that respect, it becomes clear that the Wife of

²² Chaucer, lines 894-8.

²³ The link between the Wife of Bath and the old hag has been pointed out before, see e.g. T. Slade, 'Irony in the *Wife of Bath's Tale*', *Modern Language Review*, 64 (1969), 241-7.

²⁴ This is also true with reference to the treatment of the knight's crime in both tales: we see Chaucer's knight actually committing his (882-8), whereas Florent's 'misdeed' is merely recorded (1425-30).

Bath's use of direct speech leads to an increase in liveliness and drama, whereas this is hardly true of the Confessor's use of the same device.

In the Wife's tale, whenever there is direct speech, there is a lively interchange between two characters (the only exception is the very first confrontation between the queen and the knight).²⁵ In the Confessor's tale there is never (again with one exception²⁶) a true conversation between two (or more) characters; the speeches are really monologues because there is no *direct* reaction from the 'opponent'. For instance, in the Wife's tale the 'arrangement' or 'order' of speakers during the episode in bed, before the choice is offered, is as follows: *hag* (1087-97) — *knight* (1098-1103) — *hag* (1104) — *knight* (1105) — *hag* (1106-sermon). In the Confessor's tale only the hag speaks (1769-71; 1793). When the choice is offered, there follows another exchange in the Wife's tale: *hag* (1217-27) — *knight* (1230-5) — *hag* (1236-7) — *knight* (1238) — *hag* (1239-49), whereas in the Confessor's tale the knight and the old hag both speak only once (*Florent* (1821-31) — *hag* (1832-52)).²⁷

Related to this is another difference i.e. that the Wife of Bath gives *all* the conversations crucial to the plot in direct speech. In the Confessor's tale, however, great chunks of conversation are reported. Compare for example the following passages,

- 1561 'Nay,' seith Florent, 'that may noght be.'
 'Ryd thanne forth thi wey,' quod sche,
 'And if thou go withoute red,
 Thou schalt be sekerliche ded.'
- 1565 Florent behihte hire good ynowh
 Of lond, of rente, of park, of plowh,
 Bot al that compteth sche at noght. (Gower, 1561-7)
- This knyght answerde, 'Allas! and weylawey!
 I woot right wel that swich was my biheste.
- 1060 For Goddes love, as chees a newe requeste!
 Taak al my good, and lat my body go.'
 'Nay, thanne,' quod she, 'I shrewe us bothe two!
 For thogh that I be foul, and oold, and poore,
 I nolde for al the metal, ne for oore,
- 1065 That under erthe is grave, or lith above,
 But if thy wyf I were, and eek thy love.'
 'My love?' quod he, 'Nay, my dampnacioun!
 Allas! that any of my nacioun
 Sholde evere so foule disparaged be!' (Chaucer, 1058-69)

²⁵ Only the queen speaks on this occasion. This is dramatically more appropriate, however, because the knight stands formally accused. In Gower's version the grantdame is also the only speaker.

²⁶ i.e. the meeting between old hag and knight in the wood.

²⁷ Another example is the episode at court after the knight has returned from his quest. In Gower's version only the grantdame speaks (1659-62); in Chaucer's version both the knight and the old hag voice their opinions in turn: *knight* (1037-42) — *hag* to queen (1048-53) — *hag* to knight (1054-7) — *knight* (1058-61) — *hag* (1062-6) — *knight* (1067-9).

It is clear that in the Confessor's tale there is no real emotion, no dramatic tension between the two characters; Florent is not given a chance to plead 'directly'²⁸ (compare Gower, 1565-7 with Chaucer, 1058-61), and we do not hear the old hag's second reaction to Florent's initial refusal (compare line 1567 in Gower with lines 1062-6 in Chaucer). This particular technique used by the Confessor also explains the lack of interchange in his tale: after one speaker has spoken, the answer, which one expects to be given directly, is often reported. The Confessor even uses this technique within a single dialogue. One example is the episode at court, when the knight returns from his quest. In the Confessor's tale the grantdame is the only one who is heard (the knight also plays a role but his words are all reported). She speaks three times. On the first two occasions, her speech is reported (1639-40; 1647-9), only her last words are given directly (1659-62). In the Wife's tale, it is the knight who speaks, the queen remains silent (the difference with the Confessor's tale is that the queen, unlike Florent, is *actually* silent). The knight speaks only once to the court but *all* his words are in direct speech (1037-42).²⁹

Also of interest and more on the language level is the order and placement of the words that signal a piece of direct speech. Compare the following passages,

- (i) And sche began him to bemene,
And seide: 'Florent be thi name ...' (Gower, 1540-1)
- (ii) 'This covenant I wol allowe,'
Sche seith: 'if eny other thing ...' (Gower, 1590-1)
- (iii) '... Tel me what that ye seken, by youre fey!
Paraventure it may the better be;
Thise olde folk kan muchel thyng,' quod she.
'My levee mooder,' quod this knyght, 'certeyn ...' (Chaucer, 1002-5)

²⁸ Cf. P. Guiraud, 'Modern Linguistics Looks at Rhetoric: Free Indirect Style' in J. Strelka (ed.), *Patterns of Literary Style* (University Park, Pennsylvania, 1971), pp. 77-89, who characterizes the difference between the *direct* and *indirect* style by the presence or absence respectively of a 'locutive message'. A locutive message is linked to the voice of the speaker and therefore expresses *feeling*, the use of the indirect style consequently conveys no emotion. Guiraud also distinguishes a *free indirect style*, which does contain a locutive message. This is done by suppressing *that*, the sign of subordination. It is notable that in Gower's version this device is used only once, 'And preith his Em he be noght wroth,/ For that is a point of his oth,/ He seith, that no man schal him wreke' (1517-19), whereas it is used very frequently in Chaucer, e.g. lines 961-4, 967, 1024-5, 1045, 1052-3, 1078-9.

²⁹ Another example is the conversation the knight has with the old hag the first time he encounters her (Chaucer lines 997-1022, Gower lines 1526-1618). In Chaucer's version *all* the words spoken by both knight and hag are in direct speech except for the last two lines, 'Tho rowned she a pistol in his ere,/ And bad hym to be glad, and have no fere.' (1021-2), but there it is obviously inappropriate for dramatic reasons. In Gower, again only part of the action is dramatized, other parts are reported indirectly, i.e. lines 1535, 1539, 1540, 1547-9. The next part of the interchange (1551-64) is more lively, but after line 1564, we again find a large section of reported speech.

There are three possibilities. The unmarked order is to have the inquit-formula first, followed by direct speech as in (i). Much more lively is the order in example (ii) where the inquit-formula is placed between the words in direct speech. This can also be combined with inversion of subject and verb, which gives the interchange an extra touch of animation as in (iii). In the Confessor's tale these inquit-formulae are used fifteen times. He has eight examples of type (i), three of type (ii) and four of type (iii). In the Wife's tale twenty-four instances are found: four are of type (i), there are no examples of type (ii), but there are twenty of type (iii).

So far three general differences in the use of direct speech have been mentioned. If we look at two parallel speeches in more detail, further differences will be found. For this purpose I shall compare the speeches of the queen and the grantdame at the beginning of the tales because their contents are fairly similar.

- 1455 And of hire Sone sche alleide
 The deth, and thus to him sche seide:
 'Florent, how so thou be to wyte
 Of Branchus deth, men schal respite
 As now to take vengeance,
 Be so thou stonde in juggement
 Upon certain condicioun,
 1460 That thou unto a questioun
 Which I schal axe schalt ansuere;
 And over this thou schalt ek swere,
 That if thou of the sothe faile,
 Ther schal non other thing availe,
 1465 That thou ne schalt thi deth receive.
 And for men schal thee noght deceive,
 That thou therof myht ben avised,
 Thou schalt have day and tyme assised
 And leve sauflly forto wende,
 1470 Be so that at thi daies ende
 Thou come ayein with thin avys.' (Gower, 1453-71)
- 900 And after this thus spak she to the knyght,
 Whan that she saugh hir tyme, upon a day:
 'Thou standest yet,' quod she, 'in swich array
 That of thy lyf yet hastow no suretee.
 I grante thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen me
 905 What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren.
 Be war, and keep thy nekke-boon from iren!
 And if thou kanst nat tellen it anon,
 Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon
 A twelf-month and a day, to seche and leere
 910 An answee suffisant in this mateere;
 And suretee wol I han, er that thou pace,
 Thy body for to yelden in this place.' (Chaucer, 900-12)

What immediately strikes the eye is the great difference in sentence structure. In spite of the fact that the speech in the Wife's tale is shorter (10.8 pentameters) than that of the Confessor (17 tetrameters), the number of complete sentences is larger, five as against three. The inner structure of the sentences is far more

complex in the Confessor's tale than in the Wife's tale.³⁰ Of the five sentences spoken by the queen, four consist of just two clauses: a main clause and a subclause (in one case another main clause). Only the second sentence (904-5) has a main clause followed by three subclauses. When the grantdame speaks, she only constructs sentences with three or more subclauses. Notice too how different the build-up of the sentences is. The queen's longest sentence (904-5) has the following structure,

main cl(ause) +
 adv(erbial) subcl. + obj(ect) cl. + rel(ative) subcl.

The clauses follow each other naturally. Compare this to lines 1455-61 of the grantdame's speech,

maincl. + + main cl. + adv. subcl. + obj.cl. + + obj.cl.
 adv. subcl. rel. subcl.

The clauses do not follow each other but are interwoven. The complexity of structure of the grantdame's speech shows it has been carefully prepared. It is well reasoned.³¹ It does not stir up emotions. It is therefore not surprising that the conditions mentioned in the speech are accepted by Florent without much ado:

This knyght, which worthi was and wys,
 This lady preith that he may wite,
 And have it under Seales write,
 What questioun it scholde be ...

Florent this thing hath undertake,
 The day was set, the time take,
 Under his seal he wrot his oth,
 In such a wise and forth he goth ... (Gower, 1472-5; 1485-8)

The queen's speech in the Wife's tale is not such a careful piece of reasoning. The use of short sentences and the simple clause structure do not suggest that she deeply considered her words beforehand.³² This seems to be corroborated by the text itself which does not mention any planning in advance — this in clear contrast to the Confessor's tale, where we are told that the grantdame deliberates on her speech before she addresses herself to Florent (1446 ff.) —, the queen simply spoke to the knight 'Whan that she saugh her tyme, upon a

³⁰ This observation also holds for practically all the other segments of direct speech, which are longer than one line. The Confessor's characters use similar complex and interwoven sentences for instance in lines 1541-6, 1583-7, 1590 ff., 1821-31, 1832 ff.

³¹ This is also clear from the context (1446-51). We are told that the old lady carefully prepares a scheme by which the knight will more or less consent to his own death.

³² This is also suggested by the fact that the queen gets down to 'business' at once, only later does she mention the rules by which the knight has to abide. In the grantdame's speech, on the other hand, the nature of the question she asks Florent is only given in line 1481.

day' (901). In the queen's case there was of course no need for a carefully worked out plan because the knight's death was not essential. The queen could do with him what she wanted — after all he was given to her 'al at her wille,/ To chese wheither she wolde hym save or spille' (897-8). This explains the personal, emotional tone of her speech; she does not speak on behalf of other confederates, like the grantdame, but purely for herself. Not surprisingly, the knight's reaction to this speech is also emotional, especially when compared with Florent's reaction given above,

Wo was this knyght, and sorwefully he siketh;
 But what! he may nat do al as hym liketh.
 And at the laste he chees hym for to wende, ... (913-15)

The impression of rationality and design versus emotion and impulsiveness³³ is of course not only conveyed by sentence structure but also by the choice of words.³⁴ In both speeches French words are used, nine in Chaucer's version (= 9.9%) and fourteen in Gower's (13.5%). The difference in percentage is in itself not spectacular. More interesting is that most of the Confessor's French words are longer, and many are heavily restricted in their use or of a rather specialized nature.³⁵ *Alleide*, *assised*, *vengement* are all very short-lived according to the OED and of infrequent occurrence; *assisen* is a verb probably introduced by Gower himself, since all first quotations in the OED are from Gower. The Wife's only unfamiliar French word is *suretee*, which occurs twice. *Assised*, *alleide*, *vengement* and *respite* (in the Confessor's language) are also distinct in that they are all used in a rather specialized legal sense. Moreover, not only lexical items but whole phrases suggest legal terminology e.g. *to take vengeance*, *to stonde in juggement*, *upon condicioun* (see OED s.v. *condition*, I₁₆) *at thi dayes ende*, where *day* is used in the sense of 'term' (see OED s.v. *day* III₉). All this stresses the official, disinterested character of the old lady's speech. The same French words also create distance between the grantdame and Florent, because of their abstract character, whereas the queen tends to minimize this distance by using concrete, physical details such as 'Be war, and keep thy neke-boon from iren' (906) and also 'the body for to yelden in this place' (912).

The queen's personal involvement is shown in yet another way, which lessens the distance between her and the knight. She *only* uses the active voice when

³³ The different choice of phrases is also in keeping with the different 'learning' of the quasi-clerical Confessor and the unschooled Wife of Bath.

³⁴ The ratio verb-noun is not distinctive. In both speeches a verbal rather than a nominal style has been used (this links up with the informal language of both poems). Also the average length of the words is similar. (For an evaluation of 'nominality' and its use in formal discourse, see R. Wells, 'Nominal and Verbal Style' (1960) in D. C. Freeman, *Linguistics and Literary Style* (New York, 1970), pp. 297-306).

³⁵ When we look at the use of French words in all the parts containing direct speech, we find that in Chaucer's version 6.3% of the words are French, in Gower's 7.6%. Again not much difference. But here, too, it should be noted that the Confessor uses more words that are unfamiliar than the Wife of Bath. In the Confessor's tale we find words like *deliverance* (1584), *acquite* (1594), *manace* (1598), *oppose* (1602), *querele* (1822), *destine* (1835), *obeissance* (1870), which, judging from the citations in the OED and MED, did not seem to become current before the last quarter of the fourteenth century.

talking to the knight, whereas the whole tone of the grantdame's speech is passive. Pure passive constructions are used in lines 1455 and 1467; constructions with neutral passive *men* in lines 1456 and 1466. The following lines are really also passive in nature:

... thou stonde in juggement (1458)

... if thou of the sothe faile, (1463)

Ther schal non other thing availe,
That thou ne schalt thi deth receive. (1465-6)

Thou schalt have day and tyme assised
And leve saufly for to wende. (1468-9)

In all these clauses Florent is the suffering object, the receiver, whereas the one who causes this treatment (the subject) is not mentioned. In the Wife's tale, both subject and object are actively present. Unlike the grantdame, the queen puts herself firmly in the foreground.³⁶ She uses no passive constructions, but speaks in the first person:

I grante thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen me (904)

Yet wol I yeve thee leve for to gon (908)

And suretee wol I han ... (911)

The difference between active and passive voice and the use of *men*-constructions is less striking in the rest of each tale. In the remainder of the Wife's tale, there are eighteen passive constructions and four *men*-constructions, in Gower there are twenty-five passive and three *men*-constructions. The use of pronouns that show personal involvement of the narrator, however, is much more prominent in the narrative passages of the Wife's tale. There we find twenty-eight instances of *I*, *me*, *we*, *us* and five of *ye*, *yow*. In the Confessor's tale we find none in the first person and only the use of *ye* when the Confessor directly addresses Amant, so not in the tale itself.

Finally a remark concerning the noticeable difference in the use of modal auxiliaries in the two speeches. The queen uses *wol* twice when talking about herself, and *kan* twice referring to the knight. Thus she makes a distinction between what she wants and what the knight can do. She makes it seem as if the knight can freely decide in this matter. In the grantdame's speech the only auxiliary used is *schal* (with the exception of *myht* in line 1467). This auxiliary is used eight times. Sometimes *schal* expresses a formal command or an instruction (cf. lines 1461, 1462, 1468) telling us what the family behind the

³⁶ Cf. B. M. Charleston, *Studies on the Emotional and Affective Means of Expression in Modern English* (Bern, 1960), p. 286, on the use of active/passive, 'As a rule the person or thing that is the centre of interest is made the subject of the sentence'. (Although this study strictly deals with Modern English, I assume that this was also the rule in Middle English.) The queen is interested in her own wishes as much as in the knight. This again shows the personal involvement of the queen as a woman, and her link with the Wife of Bath.

grantdame wants of Florent and what Florent is expected to do. This use of *schal* takes away any personal involvement of the characters. Even when *schal* is not used in a command or instruction, but as a sign of tense (as in lines 1456, 1464, 1465, 1466), the formality remains uppermost. According to the OED, *schal* as a tense sign, especially in the second and third person, (see OED s.v. *shall* B II_{8a}) is used if one wants to make a *solemn* assertion of the certainty of a future event. To sum up, the preponderance of *schal*, of passive constructions and legal language all contribute to give the Confessor's language a cold, formal flavour. This is clearly contrasted with the Wife's 'warmer', more human tone. It links up with the differences I have already noted in content and setting: the Confessor is more interested in facts, his language therefore is more direct, more concise. The Wife of Bath's interest lies in people and their motives. This interest is reflected in the texture of her language, which is looser, less precise.

So far we have seen that the differences between the two tales concerning setting, narrative structure and the way in which direct speech was employed, have led us to conclude that the Wife's tale shows a higher proportion of suspense and drama, vividness and intensity. This is confirmed by the detailed comparison of two segments of direct speech. On the basis of the above we could label the style used by the Wife of Bath as 'emotive', 'committed', 'excited', whereas that of the Confessor should be termed 'calm', 'detached', 'orderly'. More or less the same terms are found in an article by Meier on Middle English styles to denote the difference between what he and others have called the 'baroque' style and the 'classical' style.³⁷ Most of the parameters Meier recognizes in order to differentiate between these two styles, can also be applied to distinguish between the styles of the two tales under discussion here.³⁸ Three of his parameters, (i) the use of direct speech, (ii) changes of person from narrative third person and (iii) the use of active and passive voice, have already been discussed above. In all three cases the Wife's style clearly is a claimant for the 'baroque' style. Two other features of this style mentioned by Meier, i.e. (iv) the absence of clause connecting conjunctions and (v) the use of exclamations or interjections, are also evident characteristics of the Wife's style.

As to (iv), I have found twenty-one clear instances of parataxis in the Wife's tale, while I only discovered nine in the Confessor's tale. Some examples from Chaucer,

Withinne his brest ful sorweful was the goost.
But hoom he gooth, he myghte nat sojourne; (986-7)

And al day after hidde hym as an owle,
So wo was hym, his wyf looked so foule. (1081-2)³⁹

³⁷ See H. H. Meier, 'Middle English Styles in Action', *ENGLISH STUDIES*, 55 (1974), 198.

³⁸ The exceptions are (i) the use of the historical present, (ii) the use of adverbials referring to present time, (iii) the use of directional adverbs and deictics. All three devices *are* used by the Wife and the Confessor, but in similar proportions.

³⁹ Other examples of cases showing the suppression of the subordinating conjunction can be found e.g. in lines 931, 953, 962, 967, 977, 980, 996 in Chaucer; lines 1419, 1486-7, 1517, 1587 in Gower.

In both examples one would have expected a causal subclause in the second line, but we find main clauses instead. Parataxis again is a means of making a story more vivid. According to L. T. Milic, conjunctions are good for articulating one's thought, but of all the parts of speech they 'are the most unfriendly to vivacity'.⁴⁰ The Wife's preference for paratactic constructions links up with her preference for simple sentences rather than complex sentences (as noted above), since the absence of subordination is common to both. In this connection the omission of the conjunction *that* in free indirect style — we have seen (note 28) that this occurred far more regularly in the Wife's discourse — is also of interest because its effect is similar to that of parataxis and the use of simple sentences. In all these respects the Confessor makes a more frequent use of conjunctions; this befits his 'classical' style.

With reference to (v), it must be noted that exclamations and interjections are repeatedly used by the Wife of Bath, and rarely by the Confessor (twenty-one and five instances respectively). The Wife frequently utters such expressions as *pardee* (950), *by youre fey* (1002) or *upon youre fey* (1057), *allas and weylaway* (1058), *for Godes love* (1060, 1096) etc. Language, however, does not become exclamatory merely by using straightforward exclamations, but also by employing other devices such as the repetition of words, especially verbs, nouns and adjectives.⁴¹ In this respect too, the Wife of Bath's language shows a high degree of 'exclamatoriness'. Consider the following examples from the Wife's tale,

For ther as wont to *walken* was an elf,
Ther *walketh* now the lymytour hymself ... (873-4)

'What is my gilt? For Goddes love, tel me it,
And it shal been *amended*, if I may.'
'*Amended?*' quod this knyght, 'allas! nay, nay!' (1096-8)

For joye he hente hire in his armes two,
His herte *bathed* in a *bath* of blisse. (1252-3)

Such repetitions occur twenty-five times in the Wife's tale, and five times in the Confessor's tale.⁴² When the Confessor uses repetition, moreover, he not so much repeats the meaning carrying elements as the structure of the clause,

⁴⁰ See L. T. Milic, 'Connectives in Swift's Prose' in D. C. Freeman, *Linguistics and Style*, p. 244. Cf. also H. Spitzbardt, *Lebendiges English, Stilistisch-syntaktische Mittel der Ausdrucksverstärkung* (Halle, 1962), pp. 197-8, 'Wir haben ... gesehen, dass alles Konkrete, Anschauliche, Plastische, Bildhafte stärker wirken kann als das Abstrakte, Verschnörkelte, Grammatisch-Überkomplizierte. So ist es auch zu verstehen, dass die parataktische Redeweise viel kräftiger, affektvoller sein kann als die hypotaktische, weil die Nebenordnung gegenüber der Subordination naturgemäss analytisch-detaillierten, vermannigfachend-emphatischen Charakter trägt'.

⁴¹ Cf. Charleston, *Studies*, p. 51; and also H. Lausberg, *Handbuch der literarischen Rhetorik*, Vol. I (München, 1960), p. 311, who notes that this kind of repetition has an 'affektisch vereindringlichende Funktion'.

⁴² For more instances see e.g. lines 863, 879, 887-8, 889-90, 903-4, 925ff. in Chaucer. The other instances of 'syntactic' repetition in Gower are to be found in lines 1573-4, 1627, 1678 ff.

For if he deie, he hath a peine,
And if he live, he mot him binde ... (1622-3)

And, as it was that time lawe,
Sche hadde bath, sche hadde reste, (1746-7)

This kind of parallelism is obviously more structured, more formal, and cannot be said to contribute to intensity. Rather, it gives order and composure to the whole, it almost has an incantatory effect.

Besides the features mentioned in Meier's list, distinctive for the 'baroque' style, others can be found which likewise result in more intensity and involvement and which could therefore also be considered part of this style. These concern for instance the arrangement of elements within the clause (1), the use and frequency of occurrence of certain lexical items (2) and, on the phonological level, the use made of alliteration (3).

(1) In the Wife's tale we find many instances of anacoluthon (twelve), while none are found in the Confessor's tale. The presence of anacolutha gives a suggestion of disorderly or rambling thought; not surprisingly, therefore, they are not found in the ordered language of the 'classical' style. An example of such a loosely structured clause in the Wife's tale is the following, where the initial syntactic construction (865-71) is left unfinished, but rounded off by a new construction (872),

865 But now kan no man se none elves mo,
 For now the grete charitee and prayeres
 Of lymytours and othere hooly freres,
 That serchen every lond and every strem,
 As thikke as motes in the sonne-beem,
 Blessynge halles, chambres, kichenes, boures,
870 Citees, burghes, castels, hye toures,
 Thropes, bernes, shipnes, dayeryes —
 This maketh that ther ben no fayeryes. (864-72)

Other examples show the Wife of Bath breaking off discourse in mid-sentence, e.g.,

Pardee, we wommen konne no thyng hele;
Witnesse on Myda, — wol ye heere the tale? (950-1)⁴³

It is well-known that, when word order is affected by emotion, a speaker will utter first the elements which are foremost in his or her mind — the ones that are most important — and then the rest of the sentence will follow.⁴⁴ It is therefore not astonishing that in the emotive language of the Wife of Bath we find many instances of topicalization and extraposition.⁴⁵ Of the first, there

⁴³ Other instances are to be found e.g. in lines 939-41, 1031-3, 1064-6, 1109-12.

⁴⁴ Cf. Charleston, *Studies*, p. 156.

⁴⁵ As instances of topicalization, I have counted all those cases in which there is foregrounding of direct object, indirect object, subject or object complement. I have not included foregrounding

are twenty-one examples in the Wife's discourse and twelve in the Confessor's. There is moreover a striking difference between the ways in which topicalization is used by both narrators. When the Wife of Bath places a part of speech in front, she usually also inverts subject and verb; the Confessor, on the other hand, hardly ever does this. The effect of this inversion is that the foregrounded element receives even more emphasis:

And suretee wol I han, er that thou pace, ... (Ch. 911)

In hope that som wysdom sholde he lerne. (Ch. 994)

No creature saugh he that bar lyf, ... (Ch. 997)

To whom his aventure plein
He tolde, ... (Gow. 1490-1)

And thus his trowthe he leith to wedde. (Gow. 1588)

'This covenant I wol allowe,' ... (Gow. 1590)

Thus as far as topicalization is concerned, the Wife of Bath not only employs it more frequently but also more vividly.

In the Confessor's tale we find two examples of extraposition, in the Wife of Bath's thirteen. Extraposition can be of two kinds:

- (i) What alle wommen most desire
 This wole I axe, ... (Gow. 1481-2)

- (ii) And clerkes that this chance herde
 Thei writen it in evidence, ... (Gow. 1856-7)

The second example is different from the first in that *clerkes* does not really receive extra emphasis in spite of the extraposition. This is due to the fact that a subclause intervenes. In such a construction, the pleonastic pronoun is also found in formal discourse.⁴⁶ In the Wife's tale six of the thirteen instances are of type (ii), the others are like (i); in the Confessor's tale, as is clear from the examples, there is one of each.⁴⁷

Another device used in speech affected by emotion, very similar in effect to extraposition, is the *delay* of a part (or parts) of speech. In the clause the delayed element is replaced by a pronoun (here *it*), the delayed part itself follows later:

of adverbial adjuncts or prepositional objects because they occur far more often and carry less emphasis. By extraposition I understand the repetition of a fronted noun phrase by a pronoun later in the clause. Schlauch, 'Chaucer's Colloquial English', p. 1106, when discussing extraposition, observes the vividness of this device. 'How much more effective this is than the pallid logical order!'

⁴⁶ Cf. Schlauch, *ibid.*, p. 1105.

⁴⁷ Instances in Chaucer of type (i): 905, 999, 1096, 1191, 1193, 1235, 1263-4; of type (ii): 981, 983, 1010-11, 1052, 1109-11, 1113-16.

Quod she; 'to thee I telle it and namo;
Myn housbonde hath longe asses erys two!' (Ch. 975-6)

In the Wife's tale this device occurs nine times against only three instances in the Confessor's tale.⁴⁸

A final remark concerns the way in which a narrator can negate a statement. In ME double and triple negatives occur very regularly, not yet having been objected to by prescriptive grammarians. Multiple negation was used to make a statement more emphatic, just as the use of it in Modern non-standard English intensifies a negative statement. In view of the fact that the Wife has a preference for emphatic, intensifying language, it is not surprising to find that there is a clear difference in the frequency of occurrence of this kind of negation between the Wife's and the Confessor's tale. The Wife of Bath uses it fourteen times, the Confessor only four times.⁴⁹

(2) The Wife's tale is distinct from the Confessor's tale as far as the use and frequency of occurrence of certain lexical items is concerned. The Wife of Bath shows a greater tendency to select adverbs, indefinite pronouns, reflexive pronouns and correlative constructions, which confer degree or intensity, than the Confessor (see table 1).

Table 1

	Adverbs (ful, al, most, best, so, never, right, etc.)	Indef.pron. (none, no, any, every, whoso, etc.)	Reflex.pron.	Correlatives (so . . . that, swich . . that, so . . . til, as . . as, nothing . . but, etc.;
Wife of Bath	98	42	4 (874, 1028, 1155, 1227)	23
Confessor	64	12	1 (1826)	4

N.B. The numbers refer to the frequency of occurrence of the items in question; some line references are given in brackets.

It is interesting to see, moreover, that the Confessor uses many more adverbs of time and place than the Wife of Bath (96 and 62 respectively), more or less the inverse of the number of degree adverbs used by both. The Confessor is clearly more interested in exact, factual details; his narrative is more precisely defined temporally and spatially than the Wife of Bath's.

The Wife of Bath also often turns to the use of longer expressions, mainly

⁴⁸ The other instances in Chaucer are found in lines 980, 984-5, 1015-16, 1070-1, 1169-70, 1199-1200, 1250-1, 1261-2. The examples from the Confessor's tale are found in lines 1474-5, 1479-80, 1634.

⁴⁹ This difference in the use of multiple negation is independent of the use of tetrameters or pentameters. In Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess*, which is written in tetrameters, I have found twenty instances of multiple negation in an equivalent number of lines.

of popular origin, to express degree. These are very rarely used by the Confessor (eighteen in the Wife's tale, four in the Confessor's tale). A few examples will show what kind of expression I have in mind,

She swoor him, 'Nay,' *for al this world to wyne,*
She nolde do that vileynye or synne, ... (Ch. 961-2)

This is youre mooste desir, *thogh ye me kille.*
Dooth as yow list; I am heer at youre wille. (Ch. 1041-2)

I nolde *for al the metal, ne for oore,*
That under erthe is grave, or lith above,
But if thy wyf I were, and eek thy love. (Ch. 1064-6)

Swich arrogance *is nat worth an hen.* (Ch. 1112)

There are of course still other ways of expressing degree in language.⁵⁰ Degree, for instance, can be semantically present within the word itself, as in 'to run' compared with 'to walk'. Instances found in the Wife's tale are *rafte* (888), *kike* (941), *asterte* (968), *walweth* (1085), *breste* (1103) etc. It can be expressed internally, too, by means of prefixes, e.g. in the Wife's tale, *fulfild* (859), *overbyde* (1260), or by means of suffixes, especially frequentatives, e.g., *flatter* (930), *bombleth* (972). Still other ways of expressing degree are the use of periphrastic forms (e.g., *lay smylynge* (Ch. 1086)), of comparatives and superlatives (e.g., 'A fouler wight ther may no man devyse' (Ch. 999)), or of an accumulation of adjectives (a *trewre, humble wyf* (Ch. 1221)) or nouns ('blessynge halles, chambres, kichenes, boures, citees, burghes ...' (869-71)). The internal expression of degree is not prevalent in either the Wife's language or the Confessor's. Slightly more instances are found in the Wife's tale. Of the other devices, periphrastic forms only occur in the Wife's discourse but on no more than four occasions; comparative and superlative adjectives are found in more or less equal measure in both tales (about fifteen in each), while the accumulation of nouns and adjectives occurs so seldom that it can be ignored.

(3) The Wife of Bath and the Confessor also vary in the way they make use of alliteration. First, it should be noted that the total number of alliterative phrases occurring in the Wife's tale is much larger: in her discourse seventy-eight cases of alliteration are found, in the Confessor's forty-eight. Some of these instances of alliteration should be seen as accidental, and they therefore fail to carry much effect (see the examples under (i)). Other phrases, especially popular expressions, occur so often that the impact they may once have had may have worn off (see the examples under (ii)). Eighteen of the alliterative phrases in the Wife's tale must be considered accidental or faded, twenty in the Confessor's tale, which amounts to almost half.

⁵⁰ See, for instance, H. Heuer, *Studien zur syntaktischen und stilistischen Funktion des Adverbs bei Chaucer und im Rosenroman* (Heidelberg, 1932), p. 12ff.; also N. Peltola, 'Observations on Intensification in Old English Poetry', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 72 (1971), 649-90, and B. Mitchell, 'The Expression of Extent and Degree in Old English', *Neuphilologische Mitteilungen*, 77 (1976), 25-31.

- (i) Koude ye me wisse, I wolde wel quite youre hire. (Ch. 1008)
 When they be comen to the court, this knyght (Ch. 1023)
 And of his Court a Courteour: (Gow. 1410)
 The day was set, the time take, (Gow. 1486)
- (ii) ... and wendeth forth his weye. (Ch. 918)
 ... for he seith us sooth (Ch. 941)
 Til ate laste longe and late (Gow. 1820, see also 1645)
 Bot be him lief or be him loth, (Gow. 1627)
 And he lay stille as eny ston, (Gow. 1794)

The remaining alliterative phrases (sixty in the Wife's tale, twenty-eight in the Confessor's) are more effective because they heighten the intensity of the phrase; they often, for instance, accompany words which already express a certain amount of degree (iii). Sometimes they serve to make the contrast between two concepts starker or to align two concepts more closely (iv),

- (iii) Al was this land fulfid of fayerye (Ch. 859)
 Hir thoughte it swal so soore aboute her herte (Ch. 967)
 And as a bitore bombleth in the myre, (Ch. 972)
 That litel wonder is thogh I walwe and wynde. (Ch. 1102)
- (iv) And oftetyme to be wydwe and wedde. (Ch. 928)
 My lady and my love, and wyf so deere, (Ch. 1230)
 Seyde he had holde his day, as he hadde hight, (Ch. 1024)

In the course of this study, I have hinted at the appropriateness of many of the stylistic features selected by the two narrators. It would be illuminating to evaluate the difference in style on a larger scale. Within the scope of this study it is not possible to do that in detail; I can only make a few tentative suggestions here. In order to find out in how far the style used by the Wife of Bath is typical for her alone, distinguishable from other styles used in the *Canterbury Tales*, I have compared the language of her tale with that used by Chaucer's Clerk in his tale, with reference to the linguistic features discussed above. I have purposely chosen the *Clerk's Tale* because I wanted to see whether the Clerk's style and the Confessor's (both narrators are clergymen) would resemble each other on precisely those points where the Wife's and the Clerk's would diverge. As can be seen from table 2, in almost all respects, the Clerk's language is much closer to that of the Confessor than to that of the Wife of Bath. The only notable exception is the use of topicalization: even more instances of topicalization are found in the Clerk's tale than in the Wife's tale. It is possible that topicalization is used more regularly by Chaucer generally, i.e. that it may be more characteristic of Chaucer's personal style in contrast to Gower's style, or, more precisely, the Confessor's style. No definite conclusions can be drawn on the basis of this rather limited comparison.

In how far is the Confessor's style typical of the Confessor? I have not been able to discern any notable differences in style between the Prologue, spoken by Gower in his own person, and the tales and speeches delivered by the Confessor. This is perhaps not surprising because Gower's motives for composing

Table 2

	parataxis	ana- coluthon	topical- ization	extra- position	delay	exclam- ations	repetition of words
W. of B.	21	12	21	13	9	21	25
Clerk	2	—	28	1	2	4	5
Confessor	9	—	12	2	3	5	5

	adv. of degree	indef.pron. of degree	reflex.pron. of degree	correl- atives	expressions of degree	alliteration (with effect)
W. of B.	98	42	4	23	18	60
Clerk	57	16	3	17	2	35
Confessor	64	12	1	4	4	28

N.B. *W. of B.'s Tale* = 407 pentameters; *Clerk's Tale* (parts I-II) = 448 pentameters *Confessor's Tale* = 468 tetrameters.

his *Confessio Amantis* largely resemble the Confessor's motives for telling his tales to Amant. Gower has written his book in order to bring balance and harmony back into the world. He tries to convince his audience of the importance of obeying the laws of Reason.⁵¹ Similarly, although on a smaller scale, the Confessor tries to show Amant that *passionate* love causes people to lose their wits and that, therefore, it is better to give up *this* kind of love,

For love, which that blind was evere,
Makth alle his servantz blind also.
My Sone, and if thou have be so,
Yet is it time to withdrawe,
And set thin herte under that lawe,
The which of reson is governed
And noght of will. (*Confessio Amantis* Bk. VIII, 2130-6)

According to the Confessor, love should be ruled by reason and regulated by laws.

I have just mentioned that there is little or no difference between Gower, the author, and the Confessor, the narrator of the *Tale of Florent*, both use more or less the same style, both have the same intentions. We have also seen that the Wife's style is not typical for Chaucer. It is also very unlikely that the character of the Wife of Bath and her motives for telling her tale are the same as Chaucer's. The distance between the Wife of Bath and Chaucer has been observed by a great number of critics who point out that by means of irony Chaucer dissociates himself from the opinions voiced by the Wife of Bath.⁵² Chaucer presents his Wife of Bath as a passionate woman, who will always have her own way,

⁵¹ Cf. G. R. Coffman, 'John Gower in his Most Significant Role' in E. Vasta (ed.) *Middle English Survey* (Notre Dame, 1965), p. 219, who notes that for Gower 'The Rule of reason ... is the basic element in his conception of an ordered universe. The use of this God-given intellectual power, he [Gower] is convinced, results in a world of peace and harmony ...'.

⁵² How, exactly, the irony works is a matter of dispute, but is not to the point here. I am only concerned with the *presence* of irony, which creates a distance between author and teller.

I folwed ay myn inclinacioun
By vertu of my constellacioun; (*W.of B.Prol.* 615-16)

But al for noght, I sette noght an hawe
Of his proverbes, n'of his olde sawe,
Ne I wolde nat of hym corrected be. (*W.of B.Prol.* 659-61)

Almost every line of her prologue is in fact a provocation, a passionate assertion of her own will. Her intentions in her tale are similarly provoking. She wants women to have 'maistrie' over men, whereas according to the medieval world view, woman should be ruled by man. Thus her disorderly and emotive 'elocutio' perfectly fits her character and topsy-turvy motives. Language and tale together form an aesthetically pleasing whole.

The 'baroque', passionate language used by the Wife of Bath, would be totally out of place in the Confessor's tale. Gower himself, in his Prologue, makes clear that 'the wordes moote be cosyng to the dede'. He writes that in the Golden Age, in contrast to the present age, when there still was harmony in this world,

The word was lich to the conceite
Withoute semblant of deceite (*Confessio Amantis*, Prolog. 113-14)

I suggest that for Gower (and, indeed for Chaucer too) not only 'word and deed' ideally should form a unit, but also 'form and content' of a poem.

This suggestion is corroborated by a remark Gower himself makes in his Prologue, and by an idea that was central to medieval poetics: medieval literary theory prescribed that 'a poem should be a literary microcosm', a replica in small of the universe, the macrocosm.⁵³ A poem should therefore, in its form and structure 'image the divinely-decreed orderliness of the universe'.⁵⁴ This cannot be but relevant to Gower's *Confessio Amantis* because the theme of this poem is the world, and how to remedy the present disorder the world is in. A poem which attempts to recreate order in the universe, should itself be ordered. The inner harmony of the poem may help us to find universal harmony. Gower refers to this concept in his description of Arion, the harp player. He writes that the world, such as it is, has need of a man like Arion,

But wolde God that now were on,
An other such as Arion,
Which hadde an harpe of such temprure,
And therto of so good mesure
He song, that he the bestes wilde
Made of his note tame and milde, ...

... And if ther were such on now,
Which cowthe harpe as he tho dede,
He myhte availe in many a stede
To make pes wher now is hate; (*Confessio Amantis*, Prolog. 1053-8, 1072-5)

⁵³ See S. K. Heninger, *Touches of Sweet Harmony, Pythagorean Cosmology and Renaissance Poetics* (San Marino, Calif., 1974), pp. 364, 365. Although this work strictly only deals with Renaissance poetry, what he says there is also fully applicable to medieval poetry.

⁵⁴ Heninger, *ibid.*, p. 383.

Arion brought harmony into the world with his 'harpe of ... temprure' and his song of 'good mesure'. Although Gower humbly admits that he is not powerful enough to 'setten al in evene / This world' (*Confessio Amantis*, BK.I, 2-3), yet his poem, qua content and texture, clearly is an attempt at bringing about harmony in this world, albeit in a limited way; Gower confines himself to the domain of love, the bond of all nature. Thus, even though we may think of Gower's poetry as dull — I would prefer to call it soothing, harmonious — , especially when compared with the sprightliness and raciness of Chaucer's verse, this 'dullness' has a function in the *Confessio Amantis*. As Wellek has so accurately observed in an article evaluating style, 'in a specific context, even monotony may contribute to aesthetic value'.⁵⁵

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⁵⁵ See R. Wellek, 'Stylistics, Poetics and Criticism' in S. Chatman (ed.) *Literary Style: A Symposium* (New York, 1971), p. 72.