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Ecce patet tensus: The Trentham Manuscript, In Praise of Peace, and John Gower's Autograph Hand

By Sebastian Sobecki

Among those witnesses of John Gower's works that are known to have been produced during his lifetime, the Trentham manuscript (London, British Library, Additional MS 59495) stands out for its remarkable design as a seemingly planned trilingual collection.¹ The manuscript, usually dated to the first year of Henry IV's reign, exclusively contains Gower's poetry—showcasing his virtuosity in English, French, and Latin. A number of its poems are either addressed to or invoke Henry, yet nothing is known about the history of this manuscript before the seventeenth century. As a result, scholarship on the Trentham manuscript (henceforth Trentham) tends to foreground the question whether this compilation was ever presented to Henry.² I will adduce fresh evidence to establish the early provenance of Trentham and show that the manuscript remained in Southwark until the middle of the sixteenth century. Second, I will offer a new context for the composition of Trentham by reading the collection against the background of Anglo-French relations during the first months of Henry's rule. Finally, I will argue for Gower's personal involvement in and continued ownership of this manuscript.

THE PROVENANCE OF THE TRENTHAM MANUSCRIPT

The earliest known owner of the Trentham manuscript is one Charles Gedde, who presented the codex to Thomas, third Lord Fairfax of Cameron (1612–71) in 1656.³ From that point onward, the ownership history of the manuscript has been documented.⁴ On fol. 2v the signature “rychemonde” appears in a

I would like to thank the two anonymous readers for their comments and suggestions. Bob Yeager, Kees Dekker, and Jonathan Hsy kindly offered their thoughts and corrections. I am particularly grateful to Linne Mooney for her generous advice.

¹ The manuscript formerly belonged to the now demolished Trentham Hall in Staffordshire. On this manuscript, see R. F. Yeager, “Politics and the French Language in England during the Hundred Years' War: The Case of John Gower,” in *Inscribing the Hundred Years' War in French and English Cultures*, ed. Denise Baker (Albany, NY, 2000), 127–57; Lynn Staley, *Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II* (Philadelphia, 2006), 346–49; Siân Echard, *Printing the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia, 2008); Candace Barrington, “The Trentham Manuscript as Broken Prosthesis: Wholeness and Disability in Lancastrian England,” *Accessus* 1 (2013): 1–33; and Arthur W. Bahr, “Reading Codicological Form in John Gower's Trentham Manuscript,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 33 (2011): 219–62, reprinted with changes in Arthur Bahr, *Fragments and Assemblages: Forming Compilations of Medieval London* (Chicago, 2013).

² Bahr, “Reading Codicological Form,” 222 n. 10.

³ Add. MS 59495, fol. 5r.

⁴ Echard, *Printing the Middle Ages*, 110–13, and the description in the British Library Catalogue of Archives and Manuscripts, <http://searcharchives.bl.uk/>, under vol. 1 for Add. MS 59495.

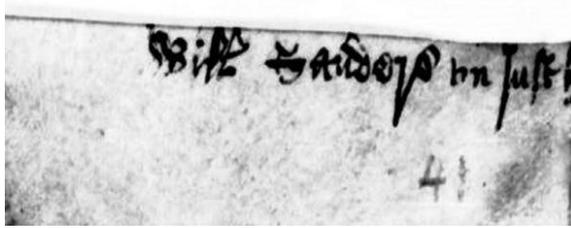


Fig. 1. London, British Library, Add. MS 59495, inscription on fol. 41r. © The British Library Board.

sixteenth-century hand, followed by the annotation “Liber Hen: Septimi tunc Comitis Richmond manu propria script,” identified in the current record of the British Library catalog as written in Fairfax’s hand.⁵ However, the authenticity of the claim that Trentham may have been in the possession of Henry VII when he was Earl of Richmond cannot be verified.

There is another inscription in Trentham that has been hitherto unidentified but which contains vital information for the early provenance of this manuscript. In the top right corner of the last folio (41r) the following inscription appears: “Will Sanders vn Just” (Fig. 1). George Macaulay tentatively described this as a fifteenth-century hand, adding that the writing appears to be “cut away.”⁶ The current record in the British Library corrects Macaulay’s dating, identifying the handwriting as belonging to a sixteenth-century legal hand.⁷ But the inscription features not one but two hands: the portion “Will Sanders” is indeed written in a legal hand of the sixteenth century. The forward-sloping ascender on *d*, the spiked descender on *r*, and a number of the remaining letters forms are characteristic of manorial, ecclesiastical, and quarter-court records throughout the sixteenth century (Figs. 2–3).⁸ The two-compartment Anglicana *a* becomes less common in the last quarter of the century, where the single-compartment Secretary *a* predominates. This is an early to mid-Tudor legal hand with mixed features and Chancery forms. By contrast, “vn Just” is written in a later italic hand of the seventeenth century. As an abbreviation, *un Just* is commonly accompanied by *de P.*, and stands for *un justice de peace*, law French for “Justice of the Peace.”⁹ The remaining text, surmised by Macaulay as cut away and denoted by “(?)” in the British

⁵ This inscription is discussed by Echard, *Printing the Middle Ages*, 110 and 112 (Echard mistakenly gives “fol. 6v.”).

⁶ G. C. Macaulay, ed., *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 4 vols. (Oxford, 1899–1902), 1:lxxxii. Michael Livingston, in his edition of *In Praise of Peace*, reiterates Macaulay’s impression that the writing has been cut off: Michael Livingston and R. F. Yeager, eds., *The Minor Latin Works with In Praise of Peace* (Kalamazoo, MI, 2005), note to line 47.

⁷ The British Library Catalogue of Archives and Manuscripts, <http://searcharchives.bl.uk/>, under vol. 1 for Add. MS 59495.

⁸ Figures 2–3 contain examples of comparable legal hands from sixteenth documents.

⁹ See, for instance, the 1659 printing (STC 1253:15) of John Rastell’s standard work, the bilingual *Les termes de la ley* (on 284v, under the entry for “Sessions”, the law French column has “Just de P.”).

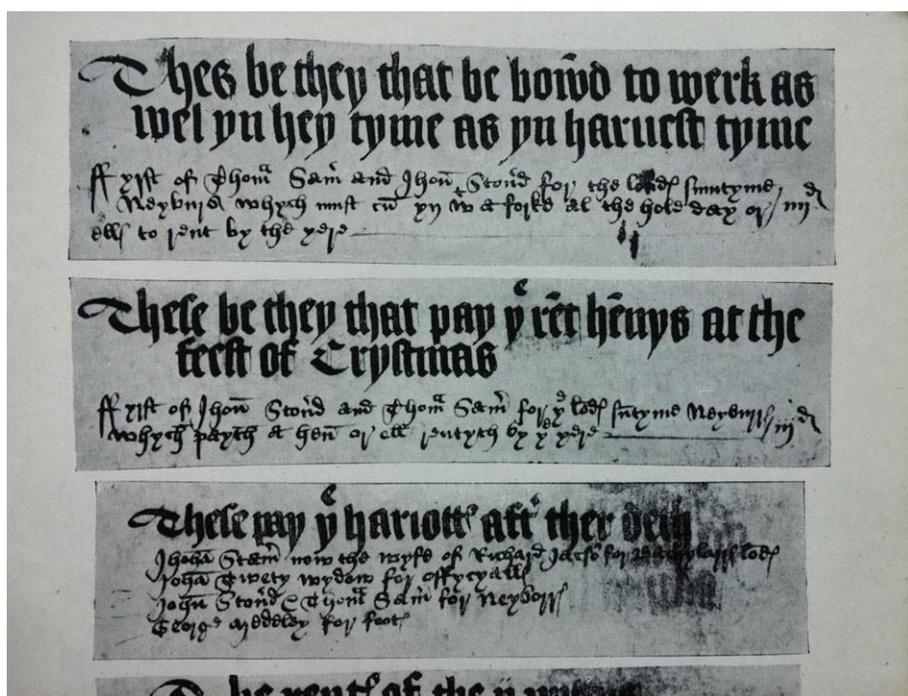


Fig. 2. (Color online) Extracts from Manorial Rental, 1529. Hilda E. P. Grieve, *Some Examples of English Handwriting, from Essex Official, Ecclesiastical, Estate and Family Archives of the 12th to the 17th Century* (Chelmsford, 1949), 9. By courtesy of Essex Record Office.

Library record, can be read, too. Given its location at the very top-right edge of the folio, the inscription extends into the corner, which is slightly curled to the inside, producing almost a dog-ear effect. If the corner is peeled back by 2–3 mm, a capital superscript *D* above a capital subscript *P*. emerges, yielding the reading

Will Sanders vn Just
 D
 P.

The same page contains further evidence. Below and to the left of the signature a faint outline of a coat of arms can be seen (Fig. 4), showing an escutcheon containing a chevron.

“Sanders” is not an uncommon name in Tudor England, and a small number of individuals with this combination of first and surname occur in sixteenth-century records. However, the search becomes much easier when looking for a William Sanders JP in the mid-Tudor period. William Saunders (1495–1571) of Ewell in Surrey served as justice of the peace for the county from 1541 to 1564. The blazon of the Saunders family of Ewell reads “Sable a chevron Ermine between

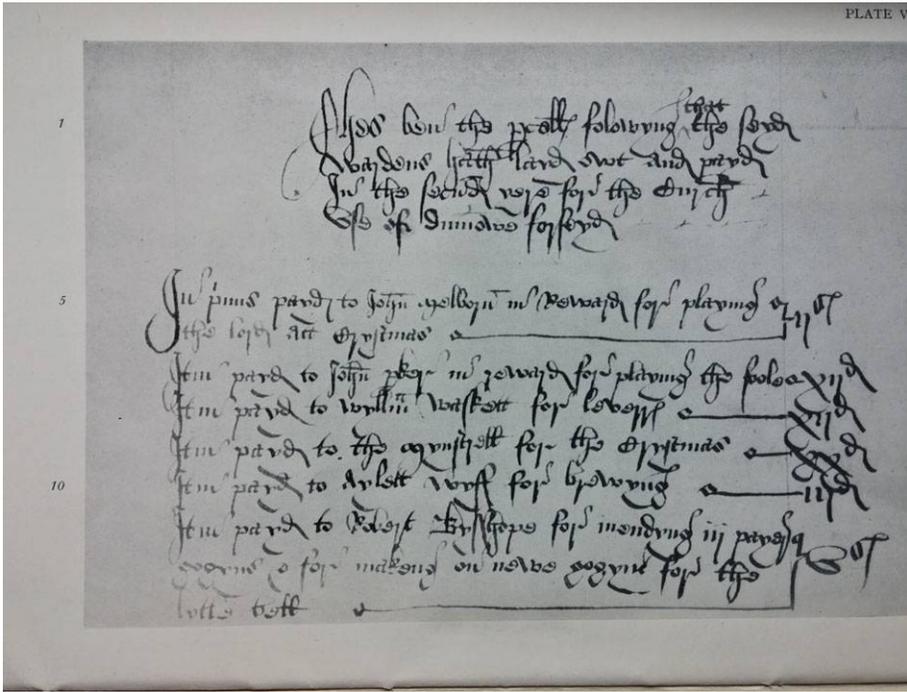


Fig. 3. (Color online) Churchwardens' Accounts, Great Dunmow, 1540. Hilda E. P. Grieve, *More Examples of English Handwriting, from Essex Parish Records of the 13th to the 18th Century* (Chelmsford, 1950), plate V. By courtesy of Essex Record Office.

three bull heads cabossed Argent,”¹⁰ which translates as a white or silver chevron set against a black background with tails and three bulls' heads cut off at the neck. The outline on fol. 41r, therefore, matches that of the various Saunders families of Surrey.

As part of the dissolution of the monasteries, Henry VIII's administration set up the Court of Augmentations to regulate the sequestration of ecclesiastical lands and moveable goods. On 1 February 1539, Saunders was appointed one of the seventeen receivers for this court, and by the middle of the following year he was firmly established in that post, which he held until 1547.¹¹ As he was receiver for Surrey and Sussex, Saunders's portfolio included St. Mary Overeys (also “Overie”

¹⁰ *Surrey Coats of Arms I-Z*, based on work done by Robert S. Bumphrey and available from the Surrey County Council, <http://www.surreycc.gov.uk/recreation-heritage-and-culture/archives-and-history/archives-and-history-research-guides/surrey-coats-of-arms>, accessed 2 March 2014. More on the coat of arms of the Sanders family in Surrey can be found in Ralph Sanders, Peggy Sanders Van der Heide, and Carole Sanders, *Generations: A Thousand-Year Family History* (Philadelphia, 2007).

¹¹ S. R. Johnson, “Saunders, William (by 1497–1570), of Ewell, Surr.,” in Stanley T. Bindoff, ed., *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons, 1509–1558*, 3 vols. (London, 1982), 3:276–78, and Michael L. Walker, “The Manor of Batailles and the Family of Saunder in Ewell during the 16th and 17th Centuries,” *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 54 (1955): 76–101, at 87. Walter Cecil



Fig. 4. British Library, Add. MS 59495, outline of escutcheon with chevron, fol. 41r. © The British Library Board.

or “Overy”) in Southwark, the Austin priory where Gower had lived for roughly the last thirty years of his life.¹² In fact, Saunders oversaw the long process of dissolving the priory. This was a cumbersome task because the priory enjoyed the status of a mitered abbey and was valued at between £624 and £656 at the time of its dissolution—the prior alone received a pension of £100, which he had negotiated up from an original £80.¹³ It was Saunders’s task to pay the six-monthly pensions of ten former monks and the prior after the dissolution of Gower’s parish.¹⁴ Saunders appears to have been chosen for this assignment because his

Richardson, *History of the Court of Augmentations, 1536–1554* (Baton Rouge, LA, 1961), 50, gives 5 July 1540 as the date of Saunders’s appointment.

¹² On Gower and St. Mary Overeys, see John Hines, Natalie Cohen, and Simon Roffey, “Iohannes Gower, Armiger, Poeta: Records and Memorials of His Life and Death,” in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Siân Echard (Cambridge, UK, 2004), 23–42, especially 28–41.

¹³ The lower figure for the value of the priory is the result of calculations made by William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum: A History of the Abbies and Other Monasteries and Cathedral and Collegiate Churches with Their Dependencies in England and Wales*, 6 vols. (London, 1846), 6/1:173; the higher figure is John Speed’s: Charlotte G. Boger, *Southwark and Its Story* (London: Grattan, 1881), 216. The prior’s pension is given in J. S. Brewer and James Gairdner, *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, 18 vols. (London, 1862–1901), 14/2:142 (no. 401).

¹⁴ Brewer and Gairdner, *Letters and Papers*, 13/2:503 (no. 1196). For the names of the monks and the pensions list, see also Brewer and Gairdner, *Letters and Papers*, 14/2:142 (no. 401), and Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum*, 6/1:173.

family had deep ties with St. Mary Overeys. The last prior, Bartholomew Linsted (alias Fowle),¹⁵ was an executor of the will of Saunders's mother and he seems to have been a family friend: in his will Saunders's father makes bequests to the prior, to the priory itself, and to the church of St. Mary Magdalene.¹⁶ In addition, Saunders inherited from his father property in Southwark, some of which was located in the parish of St. Saviour, which after 1540 became the amalgamated new parish church comprising St. Mary Overeys as well as the nearby Southwark churches St. Mary Magdalene and St. Margaret.¹⁷ Saunders also owned the Three Crowns Inn and he may have possessed further property in Southwark.¹⁸

William Saunders sympathized with the Catholic cause (he saved crosses and vestments on occasion), and he appears to have been assigned to St. Mary Overeys because of his family connections, which permitted him to pay out the pensions of his parents' friends and conduct the dissolution in a manner that minimized conflict with the affected monks. Perhaps the authorities' choice of Saunders for the sequestration of a distinguished mitred abbey provides an explanation for why the dissolution of the monasteries operated relatively smoothly and successfully in some areas. Despite his religious views, Saunders was very good at regulating the sale of former church property, and he made a career of it: throughout the 1540s and 1550s he collected related posts, including the office of commissioner for the sale of church goods in East Surrey. Saunders also joined the Chantry Commission for Surrey in February 1546 and became escheator in Surrey and Sussex three years later.¹⁹ His skills were valued even under Mary, when he was employed in her household, probably in a financial capacity.²⁰

But Linsted only surrendered St. Mary Overeys on 14 October 1541,²¹ that is, after Saunders had also been appointed a justice of the peace for Surrey. In all likelihood, therefore, Saunders may have received Trentham as part of his role in the dissolution of the priory between 1541 (when he became JP for Surrey) and 1547, the end of his receivership at the Court of Augmentations.²² In theory it

¹⁵ On Linsted, see David Knowles, C. N. L. Brooke, and Vera C. M. London, eds., *The Heads of Religious Houses: England and Wales*, 3 vols. (Cambridge, UK, 1972–2008), 3:523.

¹⁶ Walker, "The Manor of Batailles," 84.

¹⁷ Early inventories of St. Saviour, dating from the 1550s, are given in J. R. Daniel-Tyssen, "Inventories of the Goods and Ornaments of the Churches in the County of Surrey in the Reign of Edward VI," *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 4 (1869): 81–91. Some of the items listed as belonging to the church were given by Linsted (who was also known as Fowle).

¹⁸ On the Saunders' connections with Southwark, see Walker, "The Manor of Batailles," 83–86.

¹⁹ Walker, "The Manor of Batailles," 87.

²⁰ Johnson, "Saunders, William." Walker, without demonstrating any support, claims that Saunders was a cofferer under Mary: "The Manor of Batailles," 87.

²¹ Boger, *Southwark and Its Story*, 216. James Storer, *Select Views of London and Its Environs*, 2 vols. (London, 1804–5), 1: no pagination; section beginning "St Mary Overies," gives the date as 14 October 1540, whereas H. E. Malden, *A History of the County of Surrey*, 4 vols. (London, 1902–12; reprint, 1967), 2:107–12, gives 27 October 1539. But since Linsted was still alive in 1553, and Saunders oversaw the dissolution over a number of years, the manuscript did not have to reach him at the beginning of the process if Trentham was in the possession of Linsted or one of the monks.

²² Since a later hand added "vn Just DP." to his name on fol. 41r, it is not necessary for Saunders to have acquired Trentham during his time as JP. He may have obtained the manuscript during his first year in office as receiver for Surrey and Sussex.

is conceivable though highly improbable that the manuscript had left St. Mary Overeys and returned to it before it was acquired by William Saunders at the time of the priory's dissolution.²³ Saunders certainly obtained items of value for himself during his role as receiver: his will of 1570 mentions two gold crosses, which he gave to his children.²⁴ *London Lickpenny* tells us that it was possible by the early afternoon to buy a hat on Cornhill market that had only been stolen at Westminster in the morning,²⁵ but the illegal sale and appropriation of sequestered church goods continued to be a serious offense throughout the sixteenth century—as the hanging of Bardolph in Shakespeare's *Henry V* demonstrates.²⁶ Yet for many Catholics who were actively involved in the dissolution of the monasteries, the occasional keeping of items that belonged to a church with which they and their families had been associated must have been a matter of faith as well as institutional preservation. There is ample evidence from Mary's reign for the enormous difficulties the queen encountered when trying to convince parishioners to return stolen objects despite assuring them that these would be put back to their traditional use.²⁷

The discovery of William Saunders's ownership holds three significant corollaries for the study of the Trentham manuscript. First, the manuscript most probably remained in the possession of the priory between Gower's death (if not before then) and the middle of the sixteenth century. Second, if the Trentham manuscript was kept at St. Mary Overeys until the priory's dissolution, then this book was never presented to Henry IV. Third, we now know of a manuscript that in all likelihood was owned by Gower until his death in 1408. It is true, of course, that the poet's will does not mention the book but neither are his writing materials or drafts included in the document.²⁸ Presumably his blindness and advanced age made him part with such belongings in the years after he had stopped composing. Also, it would be a mistake, I think, to interpret a will as the inventory of the testator's belongings. A second error is to assume that the items listed in a will are the only items of value in the possession of the testator. A common pattern in medieval and early modern wills is to pass on the most significant manors, holdings, or estates

²³ Nothing in Trentham overtly associates the manuscript with the priory, so it is unlikely that it would have found its way back to St. Mary Overeys once it had left Southwark. There is the remote possibility that the book was indeed in the possession of Henry VII when he was Earl of Richmond: Richard Foxe, Henry's secretary at the time and bishop of Winchester from 1501, was a friend and tutor to Henry Saunders, William's father. Both were involved in the Savoy Hospital, and Foxe was the main executor of Henry Saunders's will (Sanders et al., *Generations*, 110–16). But this theory would require Foxe to have known about Trentham's association with the priory, in addition to being familiar with the Saunders' ties to St. Mary Overeys.

²⁴ Records of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury and related jurisdictions (PROB) 11/53/491. Walker, "The Manor of Batailles," 87, speculates that these crosses were church property before 1550.

²⁵ James M. Dean, *Medieval English Political Writings* (Kalamazoo, MI, 1996), lines 97–104.

²⁶ *Henry V*, act 3, scene 6.

²⁷ Ethan H. Shagan, *Popular Politics and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, UK, 2003), 289–91.

²⁸ The will has been printed by Richard Gough, *Sepulchral Monuments of Great Britain*, 2 vols. (London, 1786–96), 2:15–26. A corrected version was edited by a certain W. H. B. as "Will of John Gower the Poet, anno 1408" in *Gentleman's Magazine* 3 (1835): 49–51. For a translation, see Macaulay, ed., *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 4:xvii–xviii.

to the main heir, followed by a list of other holdings and often individual items given to lesser heirs and servants.²⁹ Moveable goods are usually allocated only to this second category of heirs, but those possessions that belong to or are contained in manors and houses granted to the main heirs are not inventoried. Gower must have owned writing utensils, parchment, drafts, and, perhaps, manuscripts that would not be deemed significant enough to be listed in his will. The *Martyrology* that he bequeaths to St. Mary Overeys is a religious work and therefore deserves to be singled out as a bequest to his priory.³⁰ Trentham, together with his writing materials, may have passed to St. Mary Overeys during his last years, or it may have reverted to the priory together with his quarters and other personal belongings.³¹

ANGLO-FRENCH RELATIONS AND *IN PRAISE OF PEACE*

Too humble to be a royal presentation copy, yet too well executed to catch dust on a shelf, the Trentham manuscript has puzzled readers for quite some time. John Fisher saw in it a present fit for a king. He deems that “both the script and initials appear to be up to the standard of the best Gower manuscripts,” whereas R. F. Yeager finds Trentham to be “plain, unlike most royal presentation copies,” adding elsewhere that the manuscript is not “of the quality usually associated with presentation copies prepared for monarchs.”³² But if Trentham was never given to Henry IV, could it be a copy or perhaps a master? The latter possibility can be excluded, I think, because among the five early copies of Gower’s works that show signs of corrections, Trentham is the only manuscript that contains no major revisions.³³ Yet if Trentham is a copy of a manuscript that was presented to Henry,³⁴ then why does it display a standard of craftsmanship that puts it on a par

²⁹ Wealthy people who owned land often produced two wills for use in different courts, one document relating to property and rents from property and the other giving personal bequests of moveable goods. See, for instance, the wills of John Carpenter and his wife Katherine, described by Thomas Brewer, *Memoir of the Life and Times of John Carpenter* (London, 1856), 91–102, and the texts of one of his wills together with those of both of Katherine’s wills, in appendices 2–4 on pp. 131–65. I am grateful to Linne Mooney for this information.

³⁰ W. H. B., “Will of John Gower,” 50.

³¹ It is also possible that he obtained his writing materials from the priory should it indeed have had a scriptorium. Although Malcolm Parkes has argued against the existence of a facility at St. Mary Overeys—M. B. Parkes, “Patterns of Scribal Activity and Revisions of the Text in Early Copies of Works by John Gower,” in *New Science out of Old Books: Manuscripts and Early Printed Books. Essays in Honour of A. I. Doyle*, ed. Richard Beadle and A. J. Piper (Aldershot, UK, 1995), passim, especially 81–82—as a mitred abbey the priory had significant holdings and therefore administrative needs. At its dissolution the last prior received a pension of one hundred pound, a sum usually designated for a bishop. If the monastery did not have its own scriptorium, it surely must have had frequent and ready access to such facilities nearby. At the New Chaucer Society Congress in Reykjavik, held in 2014, Martha Carlin and Caroline Barron revealed new documentary evidence that points to a concentration of scribes in the Southwark area.

³² John H. Fisher, *John Gower, Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York, 1964), 72; R. F. Yeager, “John Gower’s French,” in *A Companion to Gower*, ed. Echard, 137–52, at 145; and Yeager, “John Gower’s Audience: The Ballades,” *Chaucer Review* 40 (2005): 81–104, at 89.

³³ Parkes, “Patterns of Scribal Activity,” 82.

³⁴ Yeager, “John Gower’s Audience,” 88.

with presentation copies? Ralph Hanna astutely notes the extraordinary lengths to which the main copyist, M. B. Parkes's Scribe 5, goes in the manuscript:

[T]he scribe shows extreme specialisation of script, and uses two stylings of anglicana for English and Latin, a script like that of the London Herald MS [University of London Library, MS 1] for the French items only. He has a rather uneasy go of it; for nearly a full leaf at the point of transition (fols. 11v–12v), he inconsistently tries to convert his script from its Anglo-Latin anglicana to his Anglo-Norman secretary letter-forms. Both script and the texts it communicates are distinctly “modern”—Anglo-Norman poems almost contemporary and presented in an innovative writing style. But equally, their cultural bases are old-fashioned, and their script's lengthy history is appropriately a French one, associated with Edwardian imperialist adventure.³⁵

In other words, the care taken in executing Trentham, together with the various decorated initials and occasional marginal annotations, suggests that the manuscript contains some of the features of a presentation piece, whereas we now know that it most probably did not leave St. Mary Overeys during Gower's lifetime.

At the same time, the many allusions to Henry internally emphasize the paleographical and codicological nature of a presentation copy, whereas other stretches of the manuscript do not seem to concern themselves with the king. All the while, however, there is consensus that from beginning to end the Trentham manuscript reveals conscious design and careful organization. In the précis to his substantial discussion of Trentham, Arthur Bahr puts the conundrum as follows: “The manuscript thus presents its modern readers with an interpretive quandary. Its suggestions of purpose are too numerous and fundamental to ignore, but they are sufficiently complicated by literary ambiguity and material uncertainty that we cannot extract from the manuscript a single goal, audience, or agent.”³⁶ In the ensuing discussion Bahr resolves this problem by positing that Trentham “is an artfully constructed meditation on the multiple natures and implications of kingship, and the very complexity of its construction serves to acknowledge both the visceral pleasure of using aesthetic modes to grapple with such vitally important questions and the impossibility of creating clear-cut ‘propositional content’ as answers to them.”³⁷ To some extent, then, the ambiguity of form in the Trentham manuscript is seen as willed, as a productive constituent of the complex work in which this compilation engages. With the benefit of knowing that Trentham was unlikely to have been presented to Henry, I would venture a simpler answer: Gower's objective lost its urgency during the production of the manuscript. I will argue that he started the manuscript probably in December 1399 or January 1399/1400 to advocate a renewal of Richard's truce with France, but when the king surprisingly confirmed the twenty-eight-year truce on 18 May 1400, Gower's project was no longer acute. After all, if most readers agree that much of this manuscript was directed at Henry IV, then why should the composition of this collection not reflect the rapidly changing political situation surrounding the new king? By the time the poet added the final poem, which only nominally

³⁵ Ralph Hanna, *London Literature, 1300–1380* (Cambridge, UK, 2005), 227.

³⁶ Bahr, “Reading Codicological Form,” 223.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 261.

makes reference to Henry, the Trentham manuscript had become Gower's book. Since Trentham stayed with Gower until his death, it is fair to assume that he approved of its final form. And there is indeed scholarly consensus that the poet oversaw the production of this copy.³⁸

Setting the modest oblong format of the volume (232 × 155 mm) against the high quality of the main scribe and his specialized execution of scripts in three different languages, Trentham creates the impression of a rushed presentation copy.³⁹ This sense is enhanced by the fact that a number of the poems in the manuscript, such as *Ecce patet tensus*, recycle lines and themes from Gower's other works. In fact, as Candace Barrington notes, except for *In Praise of Peace* and the *Cinkante Balades*, "the manuscript's poems appear fully or partially elsewhere."⁴⁰ In addition to these two works, some of the short poems may also have been composed at the time. Much of the quandary surrounding Trentham can be explained when thinking of a deadline Gower had wished to meet with this manuscript. And the fact that *In Praise of Peace* and the *Cinkante Balades* are unique to Trentham might suggest that they hold particular clues for the purpose of the collection. Since the English poem opens the manuscript, I will concentrate my discussion on its contents.⁴¹

In Praise of Peace is Gower's only other extant English poem beside the *Confessio Amantis*. The poem consists of 385 lines of English decasyllabic rhyme royal, most of which consistently scan as iambic pentameter.⁴² In the manuscript the poem is divided into ten sections, nine of which are rubricated by flourished initials.⁴³ The content of the poem, however, features seven discernible movements. The first movement spans the preamble (stanzas 1–4), which praises Henry IV and confirms his claim to the throne, and stanzas 5–16, which are dedicated to the cultural history of peace and concentrate on the exempla of Solomon and Alexander. The second part juxtaposes war and peace in two addresses to Henry: the first lists the shortcomings of war (stanzas 16–21), the second enumerates the advantages afforded by peace (stanzas 22–24). With the fourth movement the poem leaves behind its mostly secular discussion of peace, explicating instead the religious significance of peace in the books of the Bible (stanzas 25–39). The fifth movement again turns to Henry, asking him to change the course of history and surpass the Nine Worthies (stanzas 40–44). Next, the poem enumerates the

³⁸ Barrington, "The Trentham Manuscript as Broken Prosthesis," 1.

³⁹ Another instance of a writer preparing a last-minute manuscript of advice for a king—this time Henry V—is discussed by Linne Mooney, "A New Holograph Copy of Hoccleve's *Regiment of Princes*," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 33 (2011): 263–66. For a challenge to Mooney's identification, see Lawrence Warner's forthcoming article in *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 37 (2015).

⁴⁰ Barrington, "The Trentham Manuscript as Broken Prosthesis," 2.

⁴¹ I treat the opening Latin remarks as an introduction to *In Praise of Peace*.

⁴² Besides a number of nineteenth-century editions, *In Praise of Peace* has been edited by G. C. Macaulay in *The English Works of John Gower*, 2 vols., EETS ES 81–82 (London, 1900–1901; reprint, 1969), vol. 2; Livingston and Yeager, *The Minor Latin Works with In Praise of Peace*; and Kathleen Forni, ed., *The Chaucerian Apocrypha: A Selection* (Kalamazoo, MI, 2005). All quotations from this poem are taken from Livingston and Yeager.

⁴³ Livingston and Yeager, *The Minor Latin Works*, introduction, and Candace Barrington, "John Gower's Legal Advocacy and 'In Praise of Peace,'" in *John Gower, Trilingual Poet: Language, Translation, and Tradition*, ed. Elizabeth Dutton (Cambridge, UK, 2010), 119–20.

Christian properties of peace, concentrating on charity and *pitié*, or compassion (stanzas 45–51). The seventh and final movement, occupying stanzas 52–55, acts as a conclusion to the poem and contains a final appeal to Henry.

Traditionally *In Praise of Peace* has been treated as a Lancastrian panegyric for the new king that is interlaced with occasional cautionary notes on domestic policy. However, my reading will place the poem in the context of Anglo-French relations. More specifically, I argue that *In Praise of Peace* was composed between Henry IV's coronation in October 1399 and his confirmation of the truce with France on 18 May 1400. The immediate occasion for this poem and for the compilation of the Trentham manuscript was the prospect of imminent war with France in early 1400. Essentially, in this poem Gower is asking Henry to confirm Richard II's twenty-eight-year truce with France. More broadly, however, the Trentham manuscript is conceived as an Anglo-French collection to showcase the cultural ties—and love—that bind the two countries together. By asking Henry to adopt Richard's policy of appeasement and rapprochement with France, Gower is pursuing a daring strategy in this poem and collection as a whole. As a consequence, I suggest that Gower emerges in his relationship with Henry as an assertive and bold poet who does not shy away from taking political risks.

In Praise of Peace carries no title in the manuscript, but the authorial explicit refers to the work as “carmen de pacis commendacione, quod ad laudem et memoriam serenissimi principis domini regis Henrici quarti suus humilis orator Iohannes Gower composuit.”⁴⁴ The first English title, *The Praise of Peace*, was not assigned by Walter W. Skeat, as is commonly stated, but was the idea of Edward W. B. Nicholson, Bodley's Librarian between 1882 and 1912. Macaulay states as much in his 1901 edition of the text, but a year earlier Heinrich Spies connected the English title with Nicholson in *Englische Studien*.⁴⁵ Even though Skeat used the title *The Praise of Peace* in the list of contents to his 1897 edition of various Chaucerian works, a different title, “Unto the worthy and noble Kinge Henry the Fourth,” actually precedes the text in his edition.⁴⁶ In his 1901 edition for the Early English Text Society Macaulay amalgamated both of Skeat's editorial titles into *To King Henry the Fourth in Praise of Peace*.⁴⁷

Over the last thirty years, *In Praise of Peace* has attracted the attention of some of the most discerning readers in the field. In 1987, R. F. Yeager scrutinized the poem in a perceptive survey of Gower's and Chaucer's approaches to protopacifism, and in the same year David Lawton even suggested that *In Praise*

⁴⁴ “[A] hymn in peace's commendation that John Gower, his own humble orator, composed in praise and honor of his highness, prince, and lord, King Henry IV.” The translation is from David R. Carlson, *John Gower: Poetry and Propaganda in Fourteenth-Century England* (Cambridge, UK, 2012), 204.

⁴⁵ Gower, *The English Works of John Gower*, 2:481; Heinrich Spies, “Bisherige Ergebnisse und weitere Aufgaben der Gower-Forschung,” *Englische Studien* 28 (1900): 163–208, at 181.

⁴⁶ *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer: Chaucerian and Other Pieces*, ed. Walter W. Skeat, 7 vols. (Oxford, 1894–97), vol. 7. See v and vi for the description and list of contents and 205 for the opening of the text of the poem. Macaulay states that Skeat's title was suggested by Nicholson: *The English Works of John Gower*, 2:553.

⁴⁷ *The English Works of John Gower*, 2:481.

of *Peace* may have influenced the political position taken by John Lydgate in his *Siege of Thebes*.⁴⁸ Five years later, Paul Strohm exposed the poem's affinity with Lancastrian propaganda and, in particular, with *The Record and Process of the Renunciation and Deposition* of Richard II, a document that furnished the blueprint for officially sanctioned accounts of Henry's coup d'état.⁴⁹ Strohm dates *The Record and Process* to 1400 at the earliest, thereby pushing back the composition date for Gower's poem, which had been traditionally linked to Henry's coronation.⁵⁰ On the basis of the volatile domestic situation with which Henry had to grapple during the early days of his reign, Strohm suggests 1401–4 as a plausible range for the poem's composition.⁵¹ Frank Grady, in an influential reading of *In Praise of Peace*, advances a slightly earlier terminus ad quem, again, using domestic criteria. He argues that it was written "certainly before the Percys' revolt of the summer of 1403 and probably before Henry's troubles with the Franciscans of Leicester in 1402."⁵² Subsequent treatments of the work have accepted Grady's and Strohm's post-1400 dating, though recently, for a number of different reasons, Jennifer Nuttall, David Carlson, and Michael Livingston have again recommended moving the poem nearer to Henry's coronation.⁵³ A post-1400 dating can be excluded on purely codicological grounds: Parkes has shown that *In Praise of Peace* was written by the earlier of two scribes; the hand of the second scribe added the last poem in Trentham before 1401, the second year of Henry's reign.⁵⁴

In a study of Gower's political context Carlson has recently elaborated on his reading of the poem.⁵⁵ He argues that *In Praise of Peace* is not about peace or "*pax per se*"; instead, he maintains that peace "figures in Gower's poem only as a topic, in subordination, amongst others, by which a locally particular panegyric for a particular ruler is constructed" (204). For Carlson, peace in this poem is a symbol of control (205–207). He therefore views *In Praise of Peace* essentially as "Lancastrian propaganda, even because of the occasionally critical-admonitory remarks it incorporates" (205). This is not to say that the poem

⁴⁸ R. F. Yeager, "Pax Poetica: On the Pacifism of Chaucer and Gower," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 9 (1987): 97–121, and David Lawton, "Dullness and the Fifteenth Century," *English Literature History* 54 (1987): 761–99, at 781. More recently, Robert Meyer-Lee took Lawton's observation a step further and proposed that *In Praise of Peace* may also have been a model for Lydgate's coronation poem for Henry VI: *Poets and Power from Chaucer to Wyatt* (Cambridge, UK, 2007), 37.

⁴⁹ Paul Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow: The Social Imagination of Fourteenth-Century Texts* (Princeton, NJ, 1992), 89–90.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 90. Henry was crowned on 13 October 1399.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁵² Frank Grady, "The Lancastrian Gower and the Limits of Exemplarity," *Speculum* 70/3 (1995): 552–75, at 572.

⁵³ Jennifer Nuttall, *The Creation of Lancastrian Kingship: Literature, Language and Politics in Late Medieval England* (Cambridge, UK, 2007), 57, and David R. Carlson, "Gower *pia vota bibit* and Henry IV in 1399 November," *English Studies* 89 (2008): 377–84, at 377. This is also a position taken by James Dean, "Gower, Chaucer, and Rhyme Royal," *Studies in Philology* 88 (1991): 251–75, and by Michael Livingston in his introduction to *The Minor Latin Works*. On the dating see also Livingston's note 4 and Livingston's note to line 208.

⁵⁴ On the manuscript's scribes, see Parkes, "Patterns of Scribal Activity."

⁵⁵ Carlson, *John Gower*, 203–10 and 216.

is critical of Henry, for, Carlson maintains, Gower praises “peace to argue in favour of Lancastrian domination” (205). In other words, *In Praise of Peace* is an “official verse panegyric . . . written *ad laudem regis*” (209). Because it is a laudatory work, Carlson dates the poem nearer to Henry’s coronation, suggesting that it was written “simultaneously with the arrival of the Lancastrian dynasty itself, just at the moment of Henry’s acquisition of the kingship and the patronal resources that it disposed.”⁵⁶

This reading of the poem as a panegyric is at odds with Bahr’s reappraisal of the Trentham manuscript as a compilation that balances laudatory sentiments with cautionary verses.⁵⁷ Bahr’s approach is refreshing because he views the poem in the context of the entire manuscript. His analysis leads him to state that *In Praise of Peace* as well as the manuscript itself is marked by a sobering tone:

The cautionary undertones of *In Praise of Peace* are sufficiently subtle that they require a substantial level of active apprehension from the reader. In this they begin the Trentham manuscript’s gradual construction of ambivalent patterns whose initial outlines . . . seem significant, and potentially threatening, only in retrospect. Here those outlines, if we choose to perceive them, suggest a recognition that whatever our idealistic wishes, the possibility remains that Henry’s reign will slide off in the other direction: not peace but war; not ancestry or acclamation or any of the various Lancastrian claims alluded to in the poem’s opening stanzas, but conquest—like Alexander’s—pure and simple.⁵⁸

However, Bahr’s reading overlaps with existing approaches in taking for granted that this poem is domestic in focus. Whilst agreeing with Bahr on the poem’s cautionary tone and on the need to read this work in its (sole) material context, I wish to inflect this reading trajectory with a synchronic historical angle that makes *In Praise of Peace* not so much a word of advice on domestic matters from poet to king but a stern warning about leaving in place the fragile peace with France that has characterized Richard’s reign.

Whereas the poem has been read as an early instance of pacifism, as an invitation for the king to seize religious jurisdictions,⁵⁹ and as implicitly shaped by internalized legal conventions,⁶⁰ the virtually exclusive focus on the domestic political situation has remained unchanged. But when Yeager first drew attention to Gower’s vision of a *pax poetica* in this poem, he viewed *In Praise of Peace* as addressing both domestic and foreign politics.⁶¹ I would like to take the path less

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁵⁷ Bahr, “Reading Codicological Form.” In 2011, when Bahr’s article appeared, Carlson’s book presumably was already in press.

⁵⁸ Bahr, “Reading Codicological Form,” 232.

⁵⁹ Greg Walker, *Writing under Tyranny: English Literature and the Henrician Reformation* (Oxford, 2007), 92–94.

⁶⁰ Ben Lowe, *Imagining Peace: A History of Early English Pacifist Ideas, 1340–1560* (University Park, PA, 1997), and Candace Barrington, “John Gower’s Legal Advocacy and ‘In Praise of Peace,’” in *John Gower, Trilingual Poet*, ed. Dutton, 112–25. Lowe, a historian whose reading trajectory follows the early history of pacifism, does not even notice the domestic dimension but reads the poem as an accession address to Henry with the objective of encouraging peace with France.

⁶¹ Yeager, “Pax Poetica,” 99.

traveled and delve into England's precarious relationship with France between Henry's coronation and his confirmation of the truce in the following spring.⁶²

The first four stanzas of the poem assert Henry's right to rule. This unqualified embrace of the official Lancastrian version of events appears to pose a dilemma for Gower: how does one vindicate usurpation by violent means in a poem that advocates the renunciation of precisely such violence? And indeed, Gower first justifies Henry's appropriation of the crown by force before he urges the king to renounce violence and espouse a policy of conciliation. Strohm has shown that in toeing the line—as laid down in *The Record and Process*—Gower inherited some of the flaws built into the vindication of Lancastrian rule.⁶³ This apparent conundrum has caused Frank Grady—somewhat ingeniously—to resolve the contradiction by discerning an almost subversive layer in Gower's tone: the poet uses the Lancastrian language of propaganda just as he demonstrates the limitations of such language by exposing “both the difficulties inherent in imagining a pacific Lancastrian monarchy and the problem at the heart of his own historical method.”⁶⁴ However, this only becomes an ethical dilemma if we read the poem as confining itself to offering Henry advice on domestic affairs.

Given its violent birth, Henry's reign did not get off to a good start. Quite rightly Grady characterizes the early years of Lancastrian rule as marked “by an environment of wars, rebellions, tax revolts, administrative incompetence, inflation, and Lollardy.”⁶⁵ Yet none of these developments presented Henry with much of an alternative; these problems simply had to be confronted. Making peace with rebels may not have been an option, but peace with France was a different matter altogether. Renewing hostilities with France and thereby risking to violate the fragile truce in place since 1396, on the other hand, was an action that left Henry's administration with a choice. And there are good grounds to believe that the poem makes such a distinction between domestic needs (“lond”) and international options (“world”), the former stressing royal imperative, the latter choice.

When Gower rehearses the Lancastrian defense of Henry's usurpation in the opening stanzas, he clearly refers to England and its inhabitants three times as “this lond,” “the lond,” and “the londes folk” (lines 5, 17, and 13). Clearly there is no need to argue with a premodern monarch's need to maintain quiet and stability at home—even more so if Henry's right to rule is divinely sanctioned. Somewhat obsessively, “God” is mentioned nine times in the course of the first four stanzas to establish beyond any doubt that Henry is God's choice: “God hath thee chose in comfort of ous alle” (line 4). But then the poem shifts gears.

⁶² An early date for the poem does not invalidate Strohm's observation that *In Praise of Peace* is indebted to *Record and Process*. In his recent edition David Carlson gives a date of 1399 for the latter work: *The Deposition of Richard II: The Record and Process of the Renunciation and Deposition of Richard II (1399) and Related Writings* (Toronto, 2007), introduction. Furthermore, as Chris Given-Wilson notes, G. O. Sayles had suggested that *The Record and Process* was only the culmination of an iteration of documents: “The Manner of King Richard's Renunciation: A ‘Lancastrian Narrative’?” *English Historical Review* 108 (1993): 365–70, at 388.

⁶³ Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, 89–90.

⁶⁴ Grady, “The Lancastrian Gower,” 558.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 555.

Gower slips in the concept of political choice. First comes a stanza on Solomon, who was guided by wisdom in his policies. This inspired choice is then contrasted with a minatory sequence on Alexander the Great, who opted for conquest, not of his "lond" but "Of all the world to winne the victoire" (line 38). The specter of Alexander reveals an acute fear of territorial aggression. Michael Livingston, the poem's most recent editor, stresses Gower's use of Alexander as a negative exemplum, although he, too, sees *In Praise of Peace* largely as domestic advice for Henry.⁶⁶ But as a historical exemplum, Alexander set the benchmarks for international conquest and imperial expansion. This is, after all, what justified his inclusion in the canon of the Nine Worthies, to whom stanza 41 is dedicated.

The Alexander sequence initiates a long passage of sustained criticism of war in which Gower repeatedly invokes princes and kings, clearly in reference to Christian rulers at odds with one another, as in stanza 9:

So mai a kyng of werre the viage
Ordeigne and take, as he therto is holde,
To cleime and axe his rightful heritage
In alle places wher it is withholde.
Bot otherwise, if God Himsilve wolde
Afferme love and pes between the kynges,
Pes is the beste above alle erthely thinges.

One has to ask, however, whether the incessant emphasis on international war is appropriate for a poem with an apparently domestic focus. Gower envisages that a king may wage war to enforce his rightful heritage "in alle places wher it is witholde," yet he should, nevertheless, "afferme love and pes between the kynges" everywhere else (I am more inclined to place a comma after "wolde" so that "otherwise" does not lose its sense). It is clear that "in alle places wher it is witholde" does not restrict itself to domestic matters; rights must be pursued relentlessly—as well as everywhere. These lines point to the actual objective of the poem: Gower is asking Henry to confirm Richard's twenty-eight-year truce of 1396 and affirm peace with France.

The spatial, geographic dimension circumscribed by "places wher" is a thinly veiled allusion to Gascony and the Duchy of Aquitaine of which it is part. Gascony may have presented Henry with a public as well as personal pretext for renewing hostilities with France. In 1390 Richard II made Henry's father, John of Gaunt, duke of Aquitaine for life. But Henry may well have believed—as did Froissart—that the title had been granted in hereditary tenure. A number of historians maintain that the roots of the conflict between Richard and Gaunt lie with the latter's recall from Gascony (in fact, it has been suggested that Richard's demise was accelerated by the widespread opposition to the truce of 1396).⁶⁷ On his return from France, John of Gaunt "was received by the King," as Thomas Walsingham puts it, "with honour, as was fitting, but not, so some said, with love."⁶⁸ After

⁶⁶ Livingston and Yeager, *The Minor Latin Works*, introduction.

⁶⁷ Anne Curry, *The Hundred Years War* (London, 1993), 89.

⁶⁸ *The Chronica Maiora of Thomas Walsingham, 1376–1422*, ed. D. Preest and J. G. Clark (Woodbridge, UK, 2005), 295.

his domestic ambitions had exhausted their potential, and his quixotic Castilian enterprise had resulted in spectacular failure, Gaunt fixed his eyes on Gascony, which he went on to secure with a small force in 1394.⁶⁹ This commitment to Aquitaine became a family affair after Gaunt's death: less than two weeks after Henry's coronation, on 23 October 1399, the new king made it clear that Gascony was one of his priorities by appointing his son, the future Henry V, duke of Aquitaine.⁷⁰ Whereas, as a concession to France, Richard had appointed John of Gaunt to the duchy as a vassal of the king of France, Henry IV made Gascony a direct fief of the English crown. This focus on France is substantiated by stanza 11, where Gower almost overtly refers to the hostilities that would later form part of the Hundred Years War: "The more he myghte oure dedly werre cesse, / The more he schulde his worthinesse encresse" (lines 76–77). Livingston, too, concedes that this passage refers to the conflict with France. The insular risings and rebellions were Henry's personal wars to establish his sovereignty, but "oure dedly werre" denotes a collective effort, an Anglo-French conflict that is as yet unresolved. Although the truce of 1396 has been in place since 1389, when it was sealed by Richard's marriage to Princess Isabel of France, the Anglo-French war was by no means over and can therefore still be concluded ("cesse").

A closer look at the months between Henry's accession and his delayed confirmation of the truce reveals that in the winter of 1399/1400 just about everyone in Westminster believed that war with France was imminent. It was only a lack of resources that prevented Henry from moving into action.⁷¹ What may have prompted Gower to write this poem and produce the Trentham collection, however, is the position publicly assumed by Henry toward France in the first three months of his reign. The *Recueil des croniques et anciennes istoires de la Grant Bretagne*, written between 1465 and 1475 by the pro-English Burgundian chronicler Jean de Waurin, assigns a speech to Henry that he is alleged to have made during a procession in London in January 1400: "I swear and promise to you that neither his highness my grandfather King Edward, nor my uncle the prince of Wales, ever went so far in France as I will do, if it please God and St. George, or I will die in the attempt."⁷² The problem of the Lancastrian regime change proved to be a monumental setback for Anglo-French reconciliation.⁷³ As Jonathan Sumption notes, many of Richard's supporters fled to France and brought with them their version of events.⁷⁴ Their reports styled Richard as a friend of France and

⁶⁹ Curry, *The Hundred Years War*, 72–74.

⁷⁰ Curry, *The Hundred Years War*, 92–93, and G. L. Harriss, *Shaping the Nation: England, 1360–1461* (Oxford, 2005), 426–27.

⁷¹ Curry, *The Hundred Years War*, 78. Gower received a grant of two pipes of Gascon wine a year on 21 November of that year: Fisher, *John Gower*, 68. It would be interesting to evaluate Henry's gift in this context.

⁷² Jean de Waurin, *A Collection of the Chronicles and Ancient Histories of Great Britain, Now Called England: From AD 1399 to AD 1422*, trans. William Hardy and Edward Hardy (London, 1887), 42–43.

⁷³ Curry, *The Hundred Years War*, 89. The French never accepted Henry, 90.

⁷⁴ Jonathan Sumption, *The Hundred Years War*, 3 vols. (London, 1990–2009), 3:863. See also Craig Taylor, "Weep Thou for Me in France": French Views of the Deposition of Richard II," in *Fourteenth Century England III*, ed. W. M. Ormrod (Woodbridge, UK, 2004), 207–22.

Henry's usurpation as a revolution. Jean Creton, who served as valet to the Earl of Salisbury, spoke of Richard as a king who "loved the French people with all his heart."⁷⁵ He would later write *La Prinse et mort du roy Richart*, a poem on Richard's martyrdom. In this work, Creton helps establish Henry's belligerent reputation: "And, certes, the only reason why he was deposed and betrayed, was because he loyally loved his father-in-law, the King of France, with a love as true and sincere as any man alive."⁷⁶ Similarly, in the anonymous *Chronique de la traison et mort de Richart Deux Roy d'Engleterre*, as the heads of the Earl of Gloucester and of Richard's brother, the Earl of Huntington, are placed on London Bridge, an English mob, no longer checked by a Francophile Richard, shouts: "God save our lord King Henry, and my lord the Prince! Now we will wage war with all the world except with Flanders."⁷⁷ Reflecting on Henry's usurpation, the mid-fifteenth-century chronicler Robert Blondel states that the English population tainted themselves with collective guilt by supporting Henry: "Et n'est point de doute que toute l'isle d'Angleterre qui approuva celui meffait se rendit infecté et coupable de si grant crime que non pas seulement le roy françois ne sa parens, affins et alliez, maiz aussie tous chevalliers vaillans qui comme zelateurs de justice, de tous crimes publicques mesmement qui sont perpetrez contre la roial majesté."⁷⁸ Blondel then instills the fear of conquest in his French audience by likening Henry to Scipio Africanus: "que encores viendra aucum prince de hault courage qui sera si amoureux de justice et de la chose publicque qu'il entreprendra par armes a pugnir soubz la main de Dieu si horrible cas, et que, ainssi que Scipion l'Auffricain pugnit jadis Cartage, il repetera les despoilles dont les pillars d'Angleterre ont a grant tort et par trop de foiz despoillié le royaume françois."⁷⁹ Sumption lists a number of other examples of works in support of Richard, written in French, that created the perception of English Francophobia.⁸⁰ What is even more significant from the perspective of French policy was "the widespread misconception," as Sumption puts it, that "Richard had been deposed because of his support for peace with France."⁸¹ As Sumption summarizes the situation:

[I]n France men were convinced that he was accused of abandoning Brest and Cherbourg to their former owners and of entering into the twenty-eight-year truce without the consent of his subjects. Charles VI's ministers had for years regarded Richard II as the solitary barrier against the tide of English francophobia. They were obsessed by the English King's dispute with the Duke of Gloucester, which had received extensive publicity in their country. They assumed that Bolingbroke's supporters must have hated Richard for the same reasons as Gloucester had. For many years the received opinion on the continent was that the deposition of Richard II was a declaration of war.⁸²

⁷⁵ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War*, 3:863.

⁷⁶ John Webb, "Translation of a French Metrical History of the Deposition of King Richard the Second," *Archaeologia* 20 (1824): 1–423, at 221.

⁷⁷ Benjamin Williams, ed., *Chronique de la traison et mort de Richart Deux Roy d'Engleterre* (London, 1846), 258.

⁷⁸ Alexandre Héron, ed., *Oeuvres de Robert Blondel*, 2 vols. (Rouen, 1891–93), 1:440.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 1:441.

⁸⁰ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War*, 3:863.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 3:864.

⁸² *Ibid.*

Even Christine de Pizan, as late as 1403 and 1404, praised Richard II in the highest terms.⁸³

On learning that Henry's coronation was confirmed, the French immediately reinforced their garrisons on the marches of Calais and Aquitaine.⁸⁴ Charles VI was exceptionally hostile to the new English king. The military historian Anne Curry even calls the first fifteen years of the fifteenth century a "cold war,"⁸⁵ and to some extent the truce of 1396 had never been properly observed.⁸⁶ There were English raids on the Norman coast as well as plenty of mutual, officially sanctioned acts of piracy in the months and even years after Henry's accession.⁸⁷ Then there was the problem of Isabel, Richard's widow and daughter to Charles. A. J. Pollard sees Isabel's marriage to Richard as the cornerstone of the fragile truce between England and France.⁸⁸ Much depended on how Henry would treat Charles's daughter: after a series of diplomatic incidents, Isabel was sent back to France in May 1401, but without her dowry.

A glance at privy council meetings between the end of 1399 and the following spring reveals that the inner circles of England's royal administration were preoccupied with Gascony and the anticipated outbreak of war with France. In the winter of 1399/1400 the council conducted much administrative and legal business in Gascony to bolster English interests there.⁸⁹ On Christmas Eve Henry took the unusual step of appointing a Gascon, Gaillard de Durfort, to the office of grand seneschal of Aquitaine,⁹⁰ presumably to secure the loyalty of the Gascon barons, who were being wooed by the French court at the time. In January, following the Revolt of the Earls, Henry closed all ports because he feared that once "reports of [the revolt] began circulating on the continent, they could precipitate a foreign invasion."⁹¹ And even when Charles confirmed the peace with England on 31 January in an attempt to renew diplomatic relations, which had been severed since November,⁹² Henry's new tone toward France became abrasive: "Instead of referring to Charles as *carissimo consanguineo nostro Franciae* as he had done in November . . . , he now addressed him as *adversario nostro Franciae*."⁹³

⁸³ Taylor, "Weep Thou for Me in France," 213–14.

⁸⁴ Sumption, *The Hundred Years War*, 3:864.

⁸⁵ Curry, *The Hundred Years War*, 62.

⁸⁶ Christopher Allmand, *The Hundred Years War: England and France at War, c. 1300–c. 1450* (Cambridge, UK, 1988), 26.

⁸⁷ Allmand, *The Hundred Years War*, 26–27. Much of this continued after the truce: the French threatened invasion of Gascony in 1401 and again in 1402.

⁸⁸ A. J. Pollard, *Late Medieval England 1399–1509* (London, 2000), 30–31. John A. Wagner believes that Henry's decision not to send back Isabella until August expressed his fundamental hostility to Valois France: *Encyclopaedia of the Hundred Years War* (Westport, CT, 2006), 148.

⁸⁹ Thomas Rymer, *Foedera*, ed. George Holmes, 10 vols., 3rd ed. (The Hague, 1739–45), 3/1–2:171–74.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁹¹ S. P. Pistono, "Henry IV and Charles VI: The Confirmation of the Twenty-Eight-Year Truce," *Journal of Medieval History* 3 (1977): 353–56.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 357.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 362. Only the outbreak of the Franco-Burgundian feud following the assassination of Louis of Orleans in 1407 by John the Fearless gave England peace: Maurice Hugh Keen, *England in the Later Middle Ages: A Political History* (London, 1973), 255.

Matters took a dramatic turn for the worse in February: two high-ranking English ambassadors—the bishop of Durham and the Earl of Worcester—were denied an interview by Charles, who had the English herald imprisoned in what amounted to a diplomatic scandal. Ian Mortimer believes that “Henry’s priority in January 1400 should have been the defence of the realm.”⁹⁴ He continues, “Charles VI of France had refused to recognise him as king, and had refused even to meet his ambassadors. . . . Nor would he confirm the truce. Instead he had strengthened the castles on the borders of Picardy, forbidden all trade with Englishmen, and had gathered a fleet at Harfleur ready to invade South Wales and take possession of Pembroke and Tenby castles.”⁹⁵ In response to the French reaction, Henry called a council meeting for 9 February. A confirmation of the truce was unexpectedly presented by William Faryngton, Charles’s envoy, but there were still no letters of safe conduct that would permit English envoys to meet Charles. The councilors believed that war was imminent and proceeded to raise troops at their own expense. The minutes for the council meeting concede that “war with France was [deemed] inevitable.”⁹⁶ The council agreed to mobilize on land and sea over the coming three months,⁹⁷ and in March they decided to send a force to Gascony.⁹⁸

As if aware of the negotiations between the two countries, Gower speaks of the possibility that peace can be acquired, purchased even: “And do the werre awei, what so betide. / Pouchace pes, and set it be thi side” (lines 123–24). At a time when the privy council was busy warmongering, Gower’s poem has something remarkable to say:

If eny man be now or ever was
Agein the pes thi prevé counseillour,
Lete God ben of thi conseil in this cas,
And putte awei the cruel werreior.

(lines 127–30)

This international dimension is further intensified by the appeal for a political solution that transcends a mere armistice: “To make pes, acord, and unité /Among the kinges that ben now devised” (lines 234–35). Clearest of all, perhaps, the closing stanza of *In Praise of Peace* reaches out beyond Henry and to an international audience:

Noght only to my king of pes Y write,
Bot to these othre princes Cristene alle,
That ech of hem his oghne herte endite,
And see the werre er more meschief falle.

(lines 379–82)

⁹⁴ Ian Mortimer, *The Fears of Henry IV: The Life of England's Self-Made King* (London, 2013), 210.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 210.

⁹⁶ Harris Nicolas, ed., *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council of England*, 7 vols. (London, 1834–37), 1:xi of the chronological catalog (102–6 for the actual record).

⁹⁷ Pistono views the situation as follows: “Since war against France seemed imminent, the lords present at the council agreed for the nobility to supply the king with ships, men and money during the following three months”: “Henry IV and Charles VI,” 361.

⁹⁸ Nicolas, *Proceedings and Ordinances of the Privy Council*, 1:xii–xiii.

Despite Gower's outspoken stand, the allegation that the poet was a political sycophant does not seem to go away. For many years, this charge was encapsulated by the image he paints of himself in the preface to the first edition of the *Confessio Amantis*. The poet places himself in a boat, rowing in the Thames, when he chances upon King Richard's barge:

In Temse whan it was flowende
As I be bote cam rowende,
so as fortune hir tyne sette,
My liege lord par chaunce I mette.⁹⁹

The king then invites Gower to board the royal barge before asking him to write a substantial work ("boke"), or "som newe thing" (line 51). This little vignette of poetical ambition—the paddling poet who happens to meet the cruising king—has fired the critical imagination. If this was not evidence enough of a self-congratulatory prince pleaser, then the subsequent alleged two rededications of the poem to Henry IV (the first of which was believed to have been made still during Richard's reign and addresses Henry as the Earl of Derby) only exacerbate Gower's reputation as the literary equivalent to the weather vane.¹⁰⁰ And it was Fisher who stamped the stigma of sycophancy on Gower: "Has there ever been a greater sycophant in the history of English literature?"¹⁰¹ Although some qualifications follow, it is never hard to guess whether Fisher saw in Gower an "opportunistic timeserver or a poet-philosopher of depth and integrity."¹⁰² For Robert Myer-Lee, Gower "wore a Lancastrian collar" and was "an early and widely disseminated Lancastrian apologist."¹⁰³ Much of this reputation has been dismantled by, as Georgiana Donavin puts it, "corrective analyses,"¹⁰⁴ and a recent editor of *In Praise of Peace* states that "Gower, too, has been redeemed from later scholarship's not-wholly-accurate depictions of him as a sycophant."¹⁰⁵

Strohm considers *In Praise of Peace* a piece of Lancastrian propaganda.¹⁰⁶ His reading places the poem close to "official" Lancastrian arguments.¹⁰⁷ Strohm's classification of Gower as a Lancastrian polemicist takes as a foundation *The Record and Process*: in the anti-Ricardian and jingoistic *Cronica Tripartita* Gower "had no reason . . . to withhold mention of conquest," whereas the "more

⁹⁹ Macaulay, *The English Works of John Gower*, 1:3, lines 39–42. All references to the *Confessio* will be to Macaulay's edition.

¹⁰⁰ Terry Jones offers intriguing evidence for two instead of three redactions, the second of which was made after Henry IV's usurpation. See "Did John Gower Re-Dedicate his *Confessio Amantis* before Henry IV's Usurpation?," in *Middle English Texts in Transition: A Festschrift Dedicated to Toshiyuki Takamiya on His 70th Birthday*, ed. Simon Horobin and Linne R. Mooney (Woodbridge, UK, 2014), 40–74.

¹⁰¹ Fisher, *John Gower*, 133.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 134.

¹⁰³ Meyer-Lee, *Poets and Power*, 49 and 91.

¹⁰⁴ Georgiana Donavin, "Rhetorical Gower: Aristotelianism in the *Confessio amantis*'s Treatment of 'Rethorique,'" in *John Gower: Manuscripts, Readers, Contexts*, ed. Malte Urban (Turnhout, Belgium, 2009), 155–73, at 166 n. 43.

¹⁰⁵ Livingston and Yeager, *The Minor Latin Works*, introduction n. 9.

¹⁰⁶ Strohm, *Hochon's Arrow*, 75–94.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.

conciliatory *In Praise of Peace* aspires to surmount conflict and hence relies upon the blurred and contradictory but ultimately reassuring formulations of the *Record and Process*.¹⁰⁸ *In Praise of Peace* has thus become an important building brick in the theory of Gower as a Lancastrian sycophant. If here as elsewhere in Strohm's discussion of Lancastrian propaganda *The Record and Process* becomes the basis for assessing whether a given work conforms to the criteria of "Lancastrianism," then it must follow that "blurred and contradictory" formulations form a part of this definition. But *The Record and Process* is an anguished document, a "wounded text" in Strohm's own usage. He applies this term to some of John Fortescue's writings, but the definition hauntingly invokes *The Record and Process*: "These texts straddle and embrace contradiction, irreconcilable postulates and doxa, and invest in irrational prejudice, unexamined hierarchies, and even protonationalist jingoisms. The further, and deeper, contradiction of these texts inheres in their very gesture toward self-stabilization. This is, of course, their attempt to firm up their politics by professing loyalty to a single dynastic philosophy or a particular royal incumbency."¹⁰⁹ Although Strohm does not appear to be thinking about *The Record and Process*, his concept of the "wounded text" reads like a summary of the troubled prototext of Lancastrian writings. And if *The Record and Process* is the reservoir on which Lancastrian writers draw (in addition to being the origin myth of the Lancastrian dynasty), then it is unsurprising that subsequent works betray the same nervous acceptance of a dynastic incumbency that showed unease with the circumstances of its own inception. But this argument could be inverted: if "blurred and contradictory" formulations circumscribe the narrative of Lancastrian usurpation, any text written at the time that does not distance itself unequivocally from Henry yet dabbles in public matters must appear blurred and contradictory. This is not to say that I reject Strohm's project of moving *The Record and Process* into the center of our thinking about Lancastrian literature and the concomitant language of power; rather, I would like to suggest that because this text reflects the complicated and, indeed, contradictory, if not repressed, nature of Henry's accession its use as the basis for evaluating whether a writer is Lancastrian in sympathy is limited.¹¹⁰ There can be no doubt that Gower was a Lancastrian writer, but I would argue that he was a Lancastrian writer in the same sense in which Shakespeare was an Elizabethan writer or Dickens was a Victorian writer: Gower happened to live through a significant political transition and he happened to live at a time when poetry relied on courtly endorsements instead of ticket revenues or book sales.

The poem emphatically confirms Henry's entitlement to the throne, yet it also warns the king against using the same justification to enforce his claims to Gascony and France on the grounds that conquest constitutes a choice by going beyond

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

¹⁰⁹ Strohm, *Politique: Languages of Statecraft between Chaucer and Shakespeare* (Notre Dame, IN, 2005), 147.

¹¹⁰ For other approaches to writers working in the service of the Lancastrian cause at the time, see Gwilym Dodd, "Was Thomas Favent a Political Pamphleteer? Faction and Politics in Later Fourteenth-Century London," *Journal of Medieval History* 30 (2011): 1–22, and the discussion of Richard Frampton in *Scribes and the City: London Guildhall Clerks and the Dissemination of Middle English Literature, 1375–1425*, ed. Linne R. Mooney and Estelle Stubbs (Woodbridge, UK, 2013), 107–18.

the defense of one's divine birthright. As Carlson correctly notes, "[T]o a ruler recently come to the throne by violence, or to people near him, some such remarks as Gower makes might seem critical, in the sense that they might be taken to pass judgment, in retrospect, negatively, on what had been done."¹¹¹ Advising a nervous, new ruler to exercise restraint in domestic affairs is certainly risky, but to urge him to abandon his claims to France after he had so spectacularly enforced his claim to the English throne borders on bravery. After all, until Henry confirmed the truce in May 1400 England and France were, as one historian puts it, "on the verge of open war."¹¹²

THE PURPOSE OF THE TRENTHAM MANUSCRIPT

In its manuscript context, two aspects of *In Praise of Peace* are particularly striking. First, this is the only English poem in a compilation that otherwise gathers Gower's French and Latin poetry; second, the poem occupies the prominent initial position. Codicologically, Trentham is of course self-consciously multilingual. Tim William Machan, who believes that this manuscript was prepared for Henry's coronation, notes the color rubrication throughout that marks the different languages of the codex.¹¹³ It is noteworthy that the majority of the texts in the Trentham manuscript are written in Gower's Anglo-French. A manuscript that brings together the three languages of later medieval England and that is dominated by French draws attention not only to the single English poem it contains but also to the very idea of what "English" means. As Ardis Butterfield puts it, "Gower, as no other English writer of the fourteenth century, makes us question Englishness."¹¹⁴ He does this in the Trentham manuscript more openly than in any of his other poetic or material contexts. This is vitally important because Gower's French was much less insular—and therefore less "English" in a cultural sense—than other contemporary Anglo-French texts. His *Cinkante Balades*, which also survive only in the Trentham manuscript, have prompted Brian Merrilees to argue that Gower's command of French verse "reflects the newest trends in continental French."¹¹⁵ And, as mentioned above, Ralph Hanna views the stylized script as drawing on French models. Crucially, perhaps, Butterfield notes that the *Cinkante Balades* is the earliest collection of French lyrics.¹¹⁶ The individual *balades* are not only infused with the writings of Machaut, Butterfield notes, but they also

¹¹¹ Carlson, *John Gower*, 205.

¹¹² Pistono, "Henry IV and Charles VI," 363.

¹¹³ Tim William Machan, "The Visual Pragmatics of Code-Switching in Late Middle English Literature," in *Code-Switching in Early English*, ed. Herbert Schendl and Laura Wright (Berlin, 2011), 303–33, at 310.

¹¹⁴ Ardis Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy: Chaucer, Language, and Nation in the Hundred Years War* (Oxford, 2010), 241.

¹¹⁵ Unpublished paper quoted by Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy*, 244. Butterfield's own arguments about the nature of this single-author collection of poems make a similar point. Rory Critten argues that the Trentham manuscript may be an attempt to construct a lyrical Gower: Rory G. Critten, "The Uses of Self-Publication in Late Medieval England" (PhD diss., University of Groningen, 2013), 17.

¹¹⁶ This point may have led Yeager to suggest that Trentham may have influenced Charles d'Orléans: "John Gower's Audience," 89.

participate in and partake of the work of other contemporary French poets.¹¹⁷ Is there a better way to celebrate Anglo-French relations and the lasting truce between England and France in a manuscript that brings together Gower's English writing and a French work that showcases the very latest cultural exchanges afforded by cross-Channel contact?

Thus, it is possible to read the entire manuscript as an attempt to balance not only English and French, but also England and France. In December 1399, Henry had still wanted to tear up the truce of Leulinghen and go to war with France, but in May 1400 he renewed the peace. Bahr has strengthened the link between the Trentham manuscript and Henry, largely on the grounds of the significance of *In Praise of Peace* and the *Cinkante Balades*: "Given their explicit links to Henry, the fact that *In Praise of Peace* and the *Cinkante Balades* are unique to Trentham heightens the sense that this particular object, or one modeled on it, was designed for him."¹¹⁸ Bahr continues that "we can imagine interpreting [Trentham's] multilingual codicological symmetry as an elaborate compliment to the new king: just as Trentham uses Gower's poetry to unite into a pleasing whole the multiple languages set loose upon the world by human pride at Babel, for example, so too will the manuscript's royal recipient prove able to reunite his fractious kingdom, undoing the political chaos that Gower so strongly associated with linguistic *divisioun*."¹¹⁹ Bahr stresses two significant components of the Trentham manuscript here: the appeal to Henry and the multilingual condition of this codex. Christopher Cannon, too, believes that "the context of the *Cinkante Balades* in MS Additional 59495 could not more strongly suggest a royal connection."¹²⁰ But since the context of *In Praise of Peace* as well as the *Cinkante ballades* lies not in England but in France or, rather, *between* England and France, I would like to argue that Gower encourages Henry to act as a peacemaker and heal the *divisioun* between the two countries. Thus, this manuscript, as so much of Gower's work, reveals an interest in kingship even as Henry moves into the background in the subsequent parts of Trentham.¹²¹

One of the most revealing insights Bahr generates is the codicological symmetry he discerns in Trentham.¹²² Here, perhaps the most striking feature of Trentham's architecture is the equal length of *In Praise of Peace* and the *Traitié*, each having 385 lines, if one includes the missing material from the *Traitié* that appears in other manuscript witnesses. Discounting the brief prefatory and concluding poems in Latin, the two substantial English and French poems balance each other. This symmetry between English and French may be a structural device to convey the

¹¹⁷ Butterfield, *The Familiar Enemy*, 246–48. See also Yeager, "John Gower's Audience."

¹¹⁸ Bahr, "Reading Codicological Form," 225.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 226.

¹²⁰ Christopher Cannon, "Class Distinction and the French of England," in *Traditions and Innovations in the Study of Medieval English Literature: The Influence of Derek Brewer*, ed. Charlotte Brewer and Barry Windeatt (Cambridge, UK, 2013), 48–59, at 59.

¹²¹ "In fact, the manuscript demonstrates a clear, consistent interest in kingship, including but not limited to Henry's, for the three major texts not addressed to him explicitly—'Rex celi deus,' 'Ecce patet tensus,' and the *Traitié*—all concern royal behavior and misbehavior": Bahr, "Reading Codicological Form," 227.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 224–26.

desire for continued peace between England and France, a theme throughout the manuscript. Hence, the poem following *In Praise of Peace*, the 56-line Latin *Rex celi Deus*, reiterates Gower's desire for Henry to lead a peaceful reign (lines 47 and 49) and establishes the collection as intended for Henry.¹²³ The laudatory quality of this short work serves as the formal, elevated introduction to the manuscript.

It is worthwhile remembering that Henry was not married between 1394 and 1403, whereas the peace between England and France rested on the marriage of Richard and Isabel.¹²⁴ The queen was effectively being held hostage by Henry, leaving the "marriage" between England and France—symbolized by Richard and Isabel—in suspense. Thus, the *Traitié* (which can also mean "treaty," "accord") invokes two spouses, inviting comparison with England and France. This broader meaning of love and marriage—not just between lovers hoping for marriage but also as governing other parties—is reflected in the marginal notes to *Balades V* and *VI* in the *Cinkante Balades*: "Les balades d'amont jesques enci sont fait especialement pour ceaux q'attendent leurs amours par droite mariage" (The *balades* from the beginning up to this point are made especially for those who wait on their loves in expectation of rightful marriage). "Les balades d'ici jesques au fin du livre sont universeles a tout le monde, selonc les propretés et les condicions des Amantz, qui sont diversement travaillees en la fortune d'amour" (the *balades* from here until the end of the book are universal, for everyone, according to the properties and conditions of Lovers who are diversely suffering the fortunes of Love).¹²⁵ That this universality extends beyond individuals is brought out by the envoy to the *Cinkante Balades*, exclusive to Trentham:

O gentile Engleterre, a toi j'escris,
 Pour remembrer ta joie q'est nouvelle,
 Qe te survient du noble Roi Henri,
 Par qui dieus ad redrescé ta querele:
 A dieu purceo prient et cil et celle,
 Q'il de sa grace au fort Roi coroné
 Doingt peas, honour, joie et prosperité.

[Oh gentle England, I write for you,
 For remembrance of your new joy,
 Which comes to you from the noble King Henry,
 By whom God has redressed your quarrel:
 Let one and all therefore pray to God,
 That He who with His grace crowned the King indeed
 May give peace, honor, joy and prosperity.]¹²⁶

The *Cinkante Balades* in the Trentham manuscript are not addressed to Henry per se, but to an apostrophized England, which has experienced a lovers' "querele." It

¹²³ Livingston and Yeager, *The Minor Latin Works*.

¹²⁴ For the suggestion that Henry may have had marriage plans shortly after his coronation, see Linne R. Mooney, "'A Woman's Reply to her Lover' and Four Other New Courtly Love Lyrics in Cambridge, Trinity College MS R.3.19," *Medium Aevum* 67 (1998): 235–56.

¹²⁵ Text and translation: R. F. Yeager, ed., *John Gower: The French Balades* (Kalamazoo, MI, 2011).

¹²⁶ *Balade* 51, lines 25–31; text and translation from Yeager, *John Gower: The French Balades*.

is hoped, of course, that the new king—a new lover, perhaps?—will bring “peas” to England again.

That the lovers Gower has in mind throughout Trentham are not individuals but nations (a term used with all due caution in a premodern setting) is shown most clearly in the poem that immediately follows the *Cinkante Balades*, *Ecce patet tensus* (*Behold the Taut [Bow]*), which sources almost half its lines from Gower's *Vox Clamantis*. This short poem harks back to *In Praise of Peace*, as Bahr observes, whilst continuing the amatory subject matter of the *Cinkante Balades*.¹²⁷ Written from the perspective of Cupid, this brief poem stresses the compelling force of love. But this is no simple meditation on “omnia vincit amor” (line 3),¹²⁸ for lines 18–20—which are not found in the *Vox Clamantis*—invoke a Cupid who targets not people but nations:

Vulnerat omne genus, nec sibi vulnus habet.
Non manet in terris qui prelia vincit amoris,
Nec sibi quis firme federa pacis habet.

[He wounds every nation, but receives no wound himself.
In the wars of Love there is no victor on earth,
Nor has anyone concluded with him a firm treaty of peace.]

Here again the main objectives of the manuscript are woven into a whole: love, nations, treaties, and peace. *Genus* in this poem may stand for “nation” or “people,” yet it is significant that Cupid's arrows can shoot at whole nations. I believe that this poem, which draws on the *Vox Clamantis* and which emphatically repeats the blindness of Cupid, is connected to the illustrations of an old archer (believed to be Gower) found in a number of manuscripts of the *Vox Clamantis*, including British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV (Fig. 5). The archer is portrayed as shooting at a T-in-O map that invokes the larger scale of nations rather than that of individuals. I will return to the illustration and to this poem in the final section of this article, where I hope to demonstrate the active involvement of Gower in this manuscript.

Time was pressing in December 1399 and January 1399/1400. A physically modest yet internally ambitious book might have been the only way for Gower to present his appeal to the king, given the rapid deterioration of relations between England and France. But if, for the sake of argument, we do not wish to accept a Gower concerned for the well-being of England and France, then we may still find that the same political circumstances may have stirred Fisher's opportunistic Gower into action: of all the known and publicly visible English poets at the time, Gower had arguably the largest stake in French culture. His career peaked at and profited from Richard's truce with France. If not for the overtly political and ethical reasons of avoiding war, would the sudden prospect of the disruption of his persistent access to French cultural production not have prompted Gower to act? Asking an impetuous monarch to give way took creativity, tact, and plenty

¹²⁷ Bahr, “Reading Codicological Form,” 253.

¹²⁸ All references to and translations from this poem are from Livingston and Yeager, *The Minor Latin Works*.



Fig. 5. (Color online) Gower the Archer, frontispiece of British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV, fol. 9v. © The British Library Board.

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of guts. If *In Praise of Peace* tells us anything about Gower's relationship with his Lancastrian liege, then it is that sycophancy had no place in it. But events moved rapidly. Despite the seeming inevitability of renewed conflict, Henry confirmed the truce in May 1400, thereby removing the need for Gower's manuscript. This shift can be discerned in the design of Trentham itself: as Bahr has shown, even though the symmetrical design reveals prior planning, the execution progressively removes Henry from the focus of the manuscript.

PARKES'S SCRIBE 10: GOWER'S HAND?

Malcolm Parkes has identified the work of two scribes in Trentham: Scribe 5, who produces the bulk of the manuscript, and Scribe 10, who adds *Ecce patet tensus* and *Henrici quarti primus*, the final poem in the collection.¹²⁹ In addition, Scribe 10 adds a few minor revisions to the work of Scribe 5.¹³⁰ Scribe 10 is therefore the second and last hand to appear in this manuscript. Parkes adds that this scribe only worked on one other manuscript, Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV, which contains a copy of the *Vox Clamantis* and some minor Latin poems. As I will show, Scribe 10 also finished Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV, at a time at which Gower's gradual blindness had set in but had not yet reached its most advanced stage. In this second manuscript he adds two of the final poems, *Vnanimes esse* and *Presul ouile regis*.¹³¹ Furthermore, these two manuscripts are believed to be the likeliest to have been supervised by Gower himself,¹³² and Scribe 10 only appears in these two—as a concluding hand.

Now that we know that the Trentham manuscript most probably remained in Gower's possession until his death, the last hand to write in and make revisions to the manuscript—that of Scribe 10—must enjoy a sense of authorial approval and therefore authority. The same scribe appears to have had a similar function in the only other manuscript in which he wrote, Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV. The two final poems in this manuscript, *Cultor in ecclesia* and *Dicunt scripture*, appear to have been composed some time after the manuscript had already reached its final folio, 177r. Yeager argues that *Cultor in ecclesia* may have been written between 1402 and 1408, whereas *Dicunt scripture* appears to have been composed in conjunction with Gower's will.¹³³ More importantly, the scribe who added these last two poems on the final folio, Parkes's Scribe 9, did so a number of years after Scribe 10 had finished the manuscript, probably even after Gower's death: "SCRIBE 9 appears on the final leaves of three manuscripts, GC ['C' denotes 'Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV'] and H. He probably belonged to a new generation, since his handwriting is characteristic of the second decade of the fifteenth century."¹³⁴ Therefore, at the time during which Gower lost his ability

¹²⁹ Parkes, "Patterns of Scribal Activity," 90–91 and 94.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Yeager, "Gower in Winter: Last Poems," in *The Medieval Python: The Purposive and Provocative Work of Terry Jones*, ed. R. F. Yeager and Toshiyuki Takamiya (New York, 2012), 88–89, at 89.

¹³³ Livingston and Yeager, *The Minor Latin Works*, introduction.

¹³⁴ Parkes, "Patterns of Scribal Activity," 94.

to see—between 1400 and 1402—Scribe 10 was the last hand to write in and complete the only two manuscripts in which he is attested, both of which are believed to have been supervised by Gower.

The final poem of Trentham, *Henrici quarti primus*, is of structural importance to the compilation, and Bahr has shown just how crucial the addition of *Ecce patet tensus* is for the symmetry of the collection,¹³⁵ yet his focus is not the scribes but the design of Trentham: “We therefore cannot prove that Gower, Scribe 5, or any other identifiable agent intended the Trentham manuscript to have the codicological form that it does.”¹³⁶ But what if Scribe 10, who corrected the work of Scribe 5, was the last to work on Trentham *and* the manuscript stayed with Gower? After all, Parkes argues that “the scribes . . . who were most likely to have had the opportunity to work with Gower are, perhaps, 4 and 5.”¹³⁷ Scribe 10 adds some of the most significant features to Trentham, yet the connections shared by *Ecce patet tensus* and *Henrici quarti primus* have not been noticed.

Henrici quarti primus, the final poem in the Trentham manuscript, is the first of three versions of the same lyric about Gower's failing eyesight (my emphasis):

Henrici quarti primus regni fuit annus
 Quo michi defecit visus ad acta mea.
 Omnia tempus habent; finem natura ministrat,
 Quem virtute sua frangere nemo potest.
 Ultra posse nichil, quamvis michi velle remansit;
 Amplius ut *scribam* non michi posse manet.
 Dum potui *scripsi*, set nunc quia curua senectus
 Turbavit sensus, *scripta* relinquo scolis.
Scribat qui veniet post me discreior alter,
 Ammodo namque manus et mea penna silent.
 Hoc tamen, in fine verborum queso meorum,
 Prospera quod statuatur regna futura Deus. Amen.

[It was in the first year of the reign of King Henry IV
 When my sight failed for my deeds.
 All things have their time; nature applies a limit,
 Which no man can break by his own power.
 I can do nothing beyond what is possible, though my will
 has remained;
 My ability to *write* more has not stayed.
 While I was able I *wrote*, but now because stooped old age
 Has troubled my senses, I leave *writing* to the schools.
 Let someone else more discreet who comes after me *write*,
 For from this time forth my hand and pen will be silent.
 Nevertheless I ask this one final thing, the last of my words:
 That God make our kingdoms prosperous in the future.
 Amen.]¹³⁸

¹³⁵ Bahr, “Reading Codicological Form,” 261.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 223.

¹³⁷ Parkes, “Patterns of Scribal Activity,” 95.

¹³⁸ For the text and translation of all three versions, see Livingston and Yeager, *The Minor Latin Works*.

The second version of this poem makes only small changes, mainly by giving not the first (1399–1400) but the second (1400–1401) regnal year in the first line. But the second version also changes the second line of the poem, adding a finality to Gower's blindness: whereas the Trentham recension has "when my sight failed for my deeds," the second version gives "when I stopped writing, because I am blind." The three versions are usually interpreted as indications that Gower was progressively losing his eyesight,¹³⁹ yet he only seems to have stopped writing after Trentham had been produced. This means that he could have performed some physical writing in the winter of 1399–1400 and thereafter. But what exactly does Gower mean by "writing"? It is generally assumed that his use of the verb *scribere* denotes writing in a looser sense, that is, writing as composing, the work done by an author. Yet when medieval authors speak of composing, they use words for editorial tasks, such as "compile" or "edit." In fact, Gower himself uses such a phrase in the explicit to *In Praise of Peace*, when he appears as Henry IV's orator: "suus humilis orator Iohannes Gower composuit."¹⁴⁰ I believe that *scribere* in this poem denotes physical writing, not composing. In the third and longest version of the poem Gower differentiates between "writing" and "composing":

Quamuis exterius scribendi deficit actus,
 Mens tamen interius scribit et ornat opus.
 Sic quia de manibus nichil amodo scribo valoris,
 Scribam de precibus que nequit illa manus.

[Although the act of writing externally now fails me,
 Still my mind writes within me and adorns the work.
 Thus because I can write nothing further with my hands,
 I will write with my prayers what my hand cannot.]¹⁴¹

Jonathan Hsy explains that Gower offers here "the most expanded discussion of his compositional practice as a blind poet, carefully distinguishing a physical capacity to write from an ability to compose in the mind."¹⁴² Hence, the fourfold use of *scribere* in the Trentham version refers to the physical ability to write and not to composing. In addition, in line 10 he adds that "from this time forth" he will stop writing with his hand. This poem, however, he appears to have *written* himself. If *scribere* stands for the physical capacity to write by hand, and Gower tells us here that from this point on he will no longer *write*, then in all probability Scribe 10 could be Gower himself.

The second version of the poem tells us that his blindness only prevented him from writing in the second year of Henry's reign; it follows, therefore, that Gower still possessed some ability to write in 1399–1400, when Scribe 10 entered *Henrici quarti primi* in the Trentham manuscript. It is often overlooked that the Trentham version of *Henrici quarti primi* actually does not say that he is blind.

¹³⁹ On Gower's self-identification as a progressively blind writer, see Jonathan Hsy, "Blind Advocacy: Blind Readers, Disability Theory, and Accessing John Gower," *Accessus* 1 (2013): article 2: 1–38, and Yeager, "Gower in Winter."

¹⁴⁰ See my discussion of the explicit to *In Praise of Peace* above.

¹⁴¹ Lines 11–14, Livingston and Yeager, *The Minor Latin Works*.

¹⁴² Hsy, "Blind Advocacy," 14.

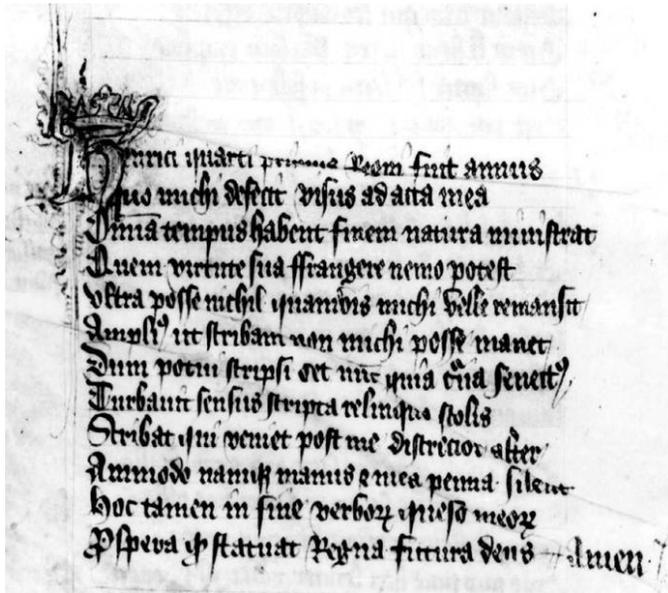


Fig. 6. Scribe 10; *Henrici quarti primus*, British Library, Add. MS 59495, fol. 39v. © The British Library Board.

The word Gower uses to describe his blindness in the two later versions of the poem is *cecus*, employed twice in each poem.¹⁴³ The identification of Scribe 10 with Gower gains support when considering that this same authorizing hand made the final revisions to Trentham and Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV and across two manuscripts only wrote four short Latin poems, the longest of which, *Ecce patet tensus*, covers only one page.¹⁴⁴

All four poems in the two manuscripts in which Scribe 10 writes are short enough to be manageable for someone coping with impaired sight. It is difficult to determine on the basis of Trentham alone whether Scribe 10 suffered from a loss of vision, but his stints in Trentham and Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV reveal one feature common in writers who have difficulty seeing. Most scribes use the bottom of the x-height as a reference point, so that shaft strokes move to the left or right in anticipation of reaching the ruled line. Scribes can judge when their shaft is 1–2 mm above the ruled line, at which point they produce the foot. But Scribe 10 draws each shaft all the way to the ruled line (Figs. 6 and 7). Although not uncommon for scribes, in disability studies this is called baseline writing, and it is

¹⁴³ Livingston and Yeager, *The Minor Latin Works*. The term *cecus* also appears in the Latin poem *De lucis scrutinio*, which Yeager dates to c. 1392–95: *The Minor Latin Works*, introduction. However, the meanings of *cecus* and *scribere* become much more nuanced and sharper after winter 1399–1400.

¹⁴⁴ A hand in the margin clarifies the word “laudis” next to line 22 (fol. 33v), but it is difficult to ascertain whether this is Scribe 10 correcting himself or perhaps a later addition, possibly made by a monk at St. Mary Overeys. One cannot be certain that the poem is complete as it stands, though there is no reason to posit that it is unfinished: Yeager describes the last line as “open-ended but nonetheless credible”, *The Minor Latin Works*, introduction.

Ecce patet tensus cetera cupidinis armis
 Unde sagitta volans ardor amoris erit
 Diabonit amor cecus tamen errat ubiq[ue]
 Dano sibi directum carpe nescit iter
 Ille suos famulos ita cecus ducit amantes
 Ad sibi quid deceat non videt ullus amans
 Sic oculus cordis carnis caligine cecus
 Deceat a ratio nil rationis habet
 Sic amor ex uelle punit quem cetera voluptas
 Nutrit et ad placitum cuncta ministrat ei
 Quibus suis alius mundus requiescit in umbra
 A sua precepta quisquis ubiq[ue] facit
 Ipse coronatus mopes simul atq[ue] potentes
 Omnes lege pari consim esse munda
 Sic amor omnia domat quicquid natura credit
 A tamen indomitus ipse p[er] omne manet
 Lacerat a rediunt ligat atq[ue] ligata resolut
 Vulnerat omne genus nec sibi uuln[us] habet
 Non manet in terris qui prelia vincit amoris
 Nec sibi quis firme federa pacis habet
 Sampsonis vires gladius neq[ue] dauid in istis
 Quis h[ab]et sensus aut solomonis habent
Quatura viri potit quam tollere nemo
 Nec tamen excusat quod facit ipsa malum
 Quatura viri que naturatur eosm
 Quod vitare nequit nec licet illud agi
 Quatura viri duo que contraria mixta
 Continet amborum nec licet acta sepi
 Quatura eorum que semp[er] habet sibi bellum
 Corporis ac anime que sua iura petunt
 Sic magis igne suo Cupido punit amantes
 A quasi de bello corda subacta tenet
 Qui nult ergo sine carnis compestere flamma
 Arcum premeat unde sagitta volat
 Nullus ab immo valet hoc euadere morbo
 Est nisi q[ui] sola gratia curat eum.

Fig. 7. Scribe 10; *Ecce patet tensus*, British Library, Add. MS 59495, fol. 33v. © The British Library Board.

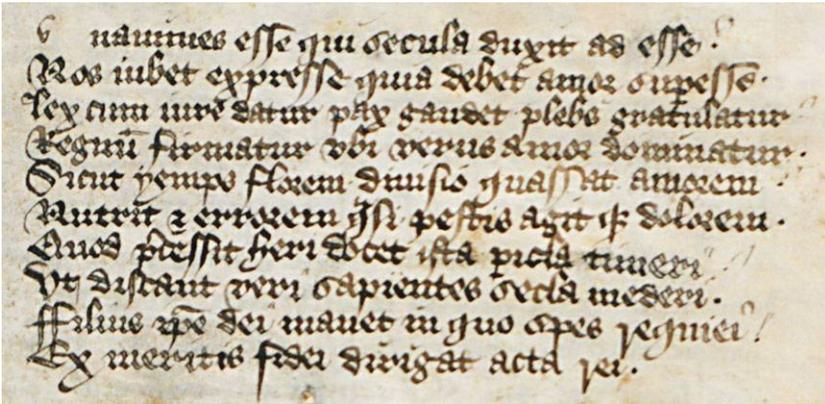


Fig. 8. (Color online) Scribe 10, *Vnanimus esse*, British Library, Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV, fol. 176v. © The British Library Board.

usually indicative of the use of a writing aid such as a ruler, grid, or thread.¹⁴⁵ Even if Gower could still partially see, perhaps as a result of debilitating cataracts—the most common cause of blindness—the ruled bottom line of the x-height could have given him additional security. Neither the other scribe in Trentham, Scribe 5, nor the scribes in Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV employ this practice.

In or after 1402, when Scribe 10 entered *Vnanimus esse* and *Presul ouile regis* in Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV, Gower's eyesight had deteriorated, and the scribe indeed makes a remarkable mistake in the first of these two poems. In line 7 of *Vnanimus esse*, starting in the middle of the line at “docet,” the hand veers from the writing line and gradually slumps below the bottom of the x-height (Fig. 8). The degree to which line 7 departs from the ruled border is so considerable that the final two letters of the last word, “timeri,” are located almost entirely below the x-height.¹⁴⁶ However, the ruled line marking the bottom of the x-height remains clearly visible. In addition, the script in lines 6–8 is much bigger than in the remaining lines.¹⁴⁷ It would be an eccentric choice to employ a scribe who has difficulties executing his hand in a manuscript most likely overseen by the poet, unless this scribe is Gower himself. At the very least one would have to explain why in two manuscripts that were so closely supervised by Gower (and one of which Gower almost certainly retained until his death) an insecure hand

¹⁴⁵ Roy A. Huber and A. M. Headrick, *Handwriting Identification: Facts and Fundamentals* (London, 1999), 193–94. Huber and Headrick add that baseline or straightedge writing is also referred to as “blind-man's writing,” 194. I am not referring to special-education assessments of “baseline writing” in the context of scholarship on cognitive or developmental disabilities; instead I am concerned with physical motor and visual impairments.

¹⁴⁶ The final word of line 7, “timeri,” and the final word of the following line, “mederi,” which has been affected by “timeri” above, have been corrected in the same hand. Their position relative to the x-height has not been modified.

¹⁴⁷ I am grateful to Linne Mooney for adding this observation.

that appears nowhere else in the poet's considerable body of material texts is permitted to provide only the finishing touches, consisting of two very short and personal poems. In theory it is possible that Gower employed as his amanuensis an unreliable scribe, perhaps an older monk at St. Mary Overeys, but it is altogether more probable that these additions were made by Gower himself. Gower could have developed such a hand during his legal career or at London's Guildhall, if Linne Mooney and Estelle Stubbs are correct in suggesting that he may have been clerk at the Guildhall in the 1360s and 1370s.¹⁴⁸ In addition, the two poems written by Scribe 10 in Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV amount to only seventeen lines in total and, taken together, are therefore much shorter than his contributions to Trentham two years earlier. These observations correspond to the rate at which Gower's condition deteriorated between 1400 and 1402, as the three versions of his poem about the onset of blindness document.

The significance of blindness and the shooting of arrows by Cupid in *Ecce patet tensus*, the other poem in Trentham written by Scribe 10, has only been once connected with illustrations of what is believed to be Gower as an archer in copies of the *Vox Clamantis*.¹⁴⁹ In particular, the image in Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV stands out (Fig. 5). Scribe 5, the main scribe of Trentham, also worked on Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV, as did Scribe 10. In fact, the Cotton manuscript may contain Gower's drawing hand. Jeremy Griffiths has traced a controlling hand over the outlines of the illuminations of the figure of the archer, including in the version in Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV, and R. F. Yeager believes this tracing hand to be Gower's: "If Gower's involvement with the copying of his works is as extensive as we believe—and I for one agree that it must have been, especially over a handful of early manuscripts including BL Cotton Tiberius A.IV—then to one degree or another [the tracing hand] was most likely Gower's."¹⁵⁰ In *Ecce patet tensus*—*Behold the Taut [Bow]*—the blind archer Cupid sends out his arrows into the hearts of nations, much as the Gower figure aims at the Isidorean globe in Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV. Throughout, the poem speaks of Cupid as blind, *cecus*, a word that is used five times in the poem and which Gower uses twice in the later version of *Henrici quarti primi* to describe his own condition.¹⁵¹ The connection with Gower's other blind archer, the illustration of the old man in copies of the *Vox Clamantis*, is further made by the fact that *Ecce patet tensus* borrows almost half its lines from *Vox Clamantis*. These lines, however, appear in rearranged order, which is indicative perhaps of Scribe 10 writing the lines from *Vox Clamantis* in *Ecce patet tensus* from memory; after all, writing a short piece from memory might be less taxing than locating lines in a copy of

¹⁴⁸ Mooney and Stubbs, *Scribes and the City*, 135–36. Mooney adds, in a personal communication, that if Gower was trained as an attorney, he would have had to serve as a clerk earlier in his career, where he would have learned to write in such scripts.

¹⁴⁹ To my mind, only Candace Barrington has made the comparison, although she sees the blind Cupid of *Ecce patet tensus* as capturing a different sense of blindness from that portrayed by illustrations of the old archer in manuscripts of the *Vox Clamantis*: "The Trentham Manuscript as Broken Prosthesis," 18–19.

¹⁵⁰ Yeager, "Gower in Winter," 89.

¹⁵¹ Livingston and Yeager, *The Minor Latin Works*.

a long poem and copying them, complete with the perils of eye skip and concomitant problems. The depiction of Gower with the bow in Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV is accompanied by a short poem, written by one of the manuscript's many scribes:

Ad mundum mitto mea iacula, dumque sagitto;
 At vbi iustus erit, nulla sagitta ferit.
 Sed male viuentes hos vulnero transgredientes;
 Conscijs ergo sibi se speculetur ibi.

[I send my darts at the world and simultaneously shoot arrows;
 But mind you, wherever there is a just man, no one will receive arrows.
 I badly wound those living in transgression, however;
 Therefore, let the thoughtful man look out for himself.]¹⁵²

This is moral Gower, then, as he wanted to be seen in his last years; an old man with failing eyesight, who meant to reach out to kings and nations, stirring them to love and peace.

Candace Barrington has shown that uniquely among Gower's work the Trentham manuscript is permeated by traces of impairment and disability, to the extent that this collection behaves as a prosthesis, "demonstrating the inherent fantasy in wholeness, completion, wellness, and perfection."¹⁵³ The Trentham manuscript, then, was begun to encourage Henry to confirm the truce with France but was completed as an early draft of Gower's very own *ars moriendi*, perfected in his trilingual funereal monument in St. Mary Overeys, now a part of Southwark Cathedral. Unsurprisingly, Trentham shares this concern for Gower's memory with Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV. A few years after Scribe 10/Gower had finished the manuscript by entering *Presul ouile regis* in the final folio, Scribe 9 inserted the last two Latin poems in the remaining space on the same folio. The last of these two poems, *Dicunt scripture*, dated by Yeager to the time of Gower's will,¹⁵⁴ reinforces the indulged plea "orate pro anima Johannis Gowr" found on fol. 174v, and Jennifer Summit therefore observes that *Dicunt scripture* conflates "the poet's manuscript with his tomb."¹⁵⁵ Gower's careful planning of his tomb finds an echo in the poet's hand closing and therefore authorizing these two manuscripts, one of which we now know for certain to have remained with him until his death.

At the time at which Scribe 10/Gower completed Trentham and Cotton MS Tiberius A.IV—and on that reasoning, Gower may also have owned the latter manuscript—Gower could still write, albeit increasingly poorly and slowly. It could be added here that *Henrici quarti primi* is the most personal of Gower's works or, at the least, the earliest version of his most personal poem. It is also a

¹⁵² Ibid., introduction.

¹⁵³ Barrington, "The Trentham Manuscript as Broken Prosthesis," 29.

¹⁵⁴ Livingston and Yeager, *The Minor Latin Works*, introduction.

¹⁵⁵ Jennifer Summit, *Memory's Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* (Chicago, 2008), 190. See also Siân Echard, "Last Words: Latin at the End of the *Confessio Amantis*," in *Interstices: Studies in Late Middle English and Anglo-Latin Texts in Honour of A. G. Rigg*, ed. Richard Firth Green and Linne Mooney (Toronto, 2004), 99–121 (in particular, 99–100).

poem in which he tells us that he can still write but will no longer do so. Read closely, Trentham contains not only his most personal but also one of the last poems Gower may very well have physically *written*—is it not understandable, then, that he would have wished to hold on to this manuscript?

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