

House Arrest: Modern Archives, Medieval Manuscripts

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In his 1994 *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Jacques Derrida begins an excursion through memory, psychology, culture, and technology by musing on the origins of the archive. The term, he writes, develops from the practice in the ancient world of housing civic documents in the dwellings of the supreme magistrates, the archons. By means of this practice, the archons enforced control over both the documents and their interpretation, so that the archive existed, and exists, “at the intersection of the topological and the nomological, of the place and the law, of the substrate and the authority.”¹ Derrida calls the passage of documents into the spaces of the archive “house arrest.”² His metaphor gives me my title, as I believe it describes, metaphorically and indeed literally, the situation of medieval manuscripts in the modern archive. The reading of a medieval manuscript today requires the scholar to enter a space that is both physical and imagined, and the manuscript’s dwelling in this place thus controls both kinds of access.

The implications of this “house arrest” were suggested to me on a recent trip to New York, to study the manuscripts of John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* in the possession of Columbia University Library and the Pierpont Morgan Library. On one of the days I was at Columbia, a magnificent translation of Bartholomaeus Anglicus’s *De proprietatibus rerum*, Plimpton MS 263, was being examined at an adjacent table; the scholar perusing it invited me to have a look, because “they don’t let it out very often.”³ This slightly facetious exchange is mirrored more poignantly in the reflections of one of the late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century book collectors studied by Robert A. Shaddy. Adrian Joline contemplated the dispersal of his collection after his death by remarking, “No one will ever be as fond of my pets as I have been, and at no distant day they will be scattered among the bidders at the inevitable auction-sale which awaits all collections save only

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those consigned to perpetual burial in some library.”⁴ The dispersal of collections, the unevenness and occasional capriciousness of access to many archives, are indeed part of house arrest as it applies to medieval manuscripts.⁵ Yet house arrest, as I conceive it, is not merely a matter of the physical incarceration of manuscripts, but also of their entanglement in a web of assumptions about what is extratextual or uninteresting and, therefore, irrelevant—to all but the wild-eyed bibliographer. If one sees bibliography, following D. F. McKenzie, as the “sociology of texts”—as that which considers “not only the technical but the social processes of [textual] transmission”⁶—then every form in which a text is manifested is an appropriate object of study, and the signs of passage from one condition to another need to be examined. In the case of the medieval text, then, one attempts both to approach the object in its “medieval” condition—to recover the medieval book—and to trace the evidence of that object’s passage from one culture to another. But these efforts are conducted in specific surroundings, and McKenzie notes that “the construction of systems, such as archives, libraries, and data-banks,” is part of the construction of texts.⁷ In what follows, I explore, through the specific details of two Gower manuscripts and my access to them, the larger questions of how archival practices and archival encounters structure and control our reading of medieval books and the texts they contain.

John Gower might seem at first glance a peculiar choice for this exploration. The manuscripts of his more famous contemporary, Geoffrey Chaucer, are in some ways more obviously imprisoned. On a recent trip to the British Library in London, for example, I had to ask that MS Harley 7334 (a copy of the *Canterbury Tales*) be removed from a display case so that I could read it. While this is a fine manuscript, it is no finer than many of the British Library’s copies of Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*.⁸ Its value—a real value—comes at least as much through the text it contains. One can argue that the freezing of famous literary manuscripts such as Harley 7334 in glass display cases amounts to a kind of disappearance in plain sight. My concern here, however, is with that part of the iceberg that lies beneath the surface, the mass of medieval manuscripts, often of texts widely read in their time and for centuries after, which are now hidden behind climate-controlled walls and sometimes recalcitrant catalogues. It may be difficult to access original Chaucer manuscripts, but facsimiles and editions abound—this is an imperfect kind of access, as my arguments below will make more clear, but it is nevertheless more than is available for many medieval texts.⁹ Gower occu-

pies a peculiar place in this respect. His association with Chaucer has guaranteed his survival in the English canon. His unusually sumptuous manuscript tradition has made the manuscripts of the *Confessio Amantis* prized items in collections around the world. These factors, however, are to be set against his steady decline in literary standing.¹⁰ In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Gower was persistently linked with Chaucer as the co-founder of the English poetic tradition, and Gower and Chaucer were both explicitly exempted from Henry VIII's 1542 ban on the printing of forbidden books.¹¹ But Thomas Berthelette's 1554 edition of the *Confessio* was the last printing of Gower until 1810, when Alexander Chalmers reprinted Berthelette's edition as volume 2 of his *Works of the English Poets*.¹² The decline in Gower's reputation in the meanwhile is best exemplified by the Reverend Henry J. Todd's apology for putting Gower before Chaucer in his 1810 *Illustrations of the Lives and Writings of Gower and Chaucer*. Todd explains that the order is a result of Gower's earlier birth date, and reflects no "precedence in respect to *talents*, but merely the accustomed tribute due to *seniority*."¹³ In other words, Gower may have been particularly susceptible to the kind of archival fetishization I discuss below. Gower was already being kept alive largely as Chaucer's shadow: in this situation, a *Confessio* manuscript's *presence* as deluxe object, combined with its *absence* as a read text, foregrounds the effects of house arrest in a most striking way.

Columbia University's Rare Book and Manuscript Library is now the home of MS Plimpton 265, a notable manuscript of the *Confessio Amantis*. It is the work of scribe D, a London-based scribe of the first quarter of the fifteenth century, who produced many important vernacular manuscripts, among them eight, in whole or in part, of the surviving copies of the *Confessio*.¹⁴ It is an attractive manuscript, large—as most Gowers are—with illuminated borders, fine initials, rubrication throughout, and a miniature of the statue seen by Nebuchadnezzar in his dream. It is, in terms of design, absolutely typical. The size, the density and quality of the decoration, and the double-column, rubricated format can be found in most of the forty-nine surviving copies of the poem—given the expense of such features, it is not surprising that more than one copy of the *Confessio* can be clearly associated with landed or noble owners, and even with the circle around the courts of Henry IV.¹⁵

The Plimpton Gower is one of many fine Gower manuscripts. What makes it unusual is the ample evidence that, before it came into the possession of the Library, this particular copy was well used from the medieval period into the seventeenth century. The direction for this essay

was suggested by folio 71r [88], down the right margin of which a large, unpracticed hand of the early sixteenth century writes: “Edmund Verne Jhon. Verne Edmund verne fransys verne Rafe verne Jhan Verne An verne.”¹⁶ This manuscript has also been called the Verney Codex, because in the sixteenth century it belonged to the Verney family, and the names suggest one of the younger Verneys practicing writing in the manuscript’s capacious margins. Certainly someone in the household knows about the value of good penmanship; written more carefully on 76r [93] is the phrase “Iff you wyst what a profytable thyng it were to wryght you wold lyerne.” The execution is neater than that of the writer who uses a reddish crayon and makes large loops and daisies in the margins from time to time. Other names include Thomas Burbanke, John Mason, and Edwarde Bromley, all of whom feel free to place their names between the columns, on the corners, and so on. Folios 105v [123] and 115v [138] have large greasy rings on them, for all the world as if someone had rested a plate of soup on the manuscript; and finally, on folio 62v [76], someone has used a pin to punch out the outline of a smiling figure (of indeterminate gender, but with well-formed legs) next to the story of Laodamia.

Many medieval manuscripts show signs of having been used or abused by subsequent owners. The reason the Plimpton Gower and another New York-based manuscript—Pierpont Morgan Library MS M690—caught my attention is twofold. First, it *is* rather unusual for *Confessio* manuscripts to have been so treated: these are, as noted above, most often high-quality or luxury manuscripts, and their large margins tend to remain frustratingly clear of readers’ interventions of any kind. But second and more important, both the Plimpton Gower and the Morgan manuscript—manuscripts which preserve evidence of postmedieval use, some of it quite casual—are *now* to be found in the most protective of surroundings. Consider the experience of gaining access to these, as to most, medieval manuscripts. At Columbia, for example, I had to present my credentials, check my belongings at the door, and refrain from touching the manuscript any more than was absolutely necessary. The contrast between this experience and the crayon marks in Plimpton 265’s margins is what set the train of thought pursued by this essay in motion: I was struck by the difference between the encounters witnessed on these manuscript pages, and the encounter one can now have with those pages. Pursuing Bourdieu’s notion of culture, as appropriated through the acquisition of cultural goods, as the “supreme fetish,” I want to argue that the framing of Gower’s text in our world of controlled museum access makes of him a fetishistic representa-

tion of the Middle Ages and of the English canon.¹⁷ In the absence of new materializations of a medieval text—the *Confessio*, for example, has not been edited since 1900¹⁸—the potential of any medieval writer to “freeze” into the archival object is magnified. Furthermore, in Gower’s case as in others’, this archival framing tends to overwrite the “unofficial” history of a manuscript, the signs of other readers who have preceded us, thus removing the manuscript from social history while also elevating the text to the cultural status of literature. Let me turn for a moment to my other example to explore these notions further.

The Pierpont Morgan Library is somewhat more rigid than Columbia in the control it exercises over the manuscripts in its collection: one must prove a need to see the original (rather than microfilm), one must refrain from rearranging for oneself the blocks that support the spine, one must not touch the script. Like all manuscript scholars, I accept such restrictions and touch the leaves of my medieval books most gingerly. I do not of course mean to suggest that these precautions are unsuitable or unnecessary.¹⁹ Yet they do dramatize a shift in the way that a modern reader and scholar experiences a medieval text through its medieval vehicle: the material object remains, but the experience of it is radically different from that of those earlier readers whose marks have been left behind. “My hands,” writes Canadian novelist and critic Alberto Manguel, “choosing a book to take to bed or to the reading-desk, for the train or for a gift, consider the form as much as the content.”²⁰ The sensual and tactile nature of books is everywhere in Manguel’s best-selling reflections on reading, as it is in another popular history, Nicholas Basbanes’s account of the passions of book collectors. In the chronicle of his tour through rare book rooms and libraries, Basbanes observes that “in each instance there was a tactile experience to savor and remember”; and his account of becoming “lightheaded” when invited to touch the pages of a Gutenberg Bible matches the similar giddiness of collectors past and present recorded in his book.²¹ Like Basbanes, I can enter these rooms which are not open to all, but as the restrictions at the Morgan emphasize, the tactile experience of medieval books is no longer a real possibility. I will not be adding my own equivalent of soup rings to any medieval manuscripts: no one would let me rest a coffee cup on Morgan M690, nor would anyone allow me to do what one earlier owner of the book did—take out a pencil and draw large, full-folio portrait heads on the flyleaves. One worships at the altar of the manuscript; one does not doodle on it.

Pierpont Morgan MS M690 was at some point in its life so unappreciated as to have been abandoned entirely. A note on the flyleaf in the hand of Henry Thomas, first earl of Ravensworth (1797–1878) reads, “This M.S. copy of the ‘Confessio Amantis’ by John Gower was found at Ravensworth Castle in a very dirty rotten condition & was repaired and rebound in the year 1861—Cura nostra et sumptibus Ravensworth.” The sense of duty to the past in that inscription and motto illustrates the shift from the casual reader to the antiquarian. Ravensworth, who published his own and translations of Latin verse, is the sort of figure familiar to those who study the Victorian construction of the past, and especially of the Middle Ages. The apparent total neglect of the manuscript between about the sixteenth century and the time Ravensworth found it is not unique—many medieval manuscripts passed through a period when, their texts having become largely incomprehensible, they were left to chance, some making their way into the collections of antiquarians, others, like MS M690, crumbling into obscurity. A manuscript’s later reintroduction to the world might be a matter of physical restoration or textual circulation, or both: collectors, antiquarians, and editors all played their part in the transmission of medieval texts and books. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Britain were crucial for these activities. A striking case in the Gower canon is that of the Trentham manuscript, now London, British Library, Additional MS 59495, which contains some of Gower’s Latin and French works. This manuscript had been in the hands of the barons and earls Gower since at least the seventeenth century, and the unusually meticulous notes in the manuscript documenting its provenance and its passage from hand to hand may doubtless be attributed as much to chauvinistic pride as to antiquarian care. The Gowers, probably erroneously, believed themselves to be descended from John Gower.²² The manuscript (with all its provenance attributions) was recopied in 1764 at the request of its owner, and this facsimile later became the printer’s text for the Roxburghe Club’s 1818 *Balades and other poems by John Gower*, edited by another noble Gower.²³ Ravensworth’s restoration of Morgan M690, then, is merely one example of the kind of antiquarian activity which, for a variety of motives, transmitted the Middle Ages to later generations, and Ravensworth’s note in his manuscript exemplifies the ways in which the story of medieval books is written, not only in the century of their production, but in all the centuries that follow.

Morgan M690 eventually made its way through the bookseller Maggs Bros. into the Morgan Library—built around the collection of John Pierpont Morgan Sr. (1837–1913)—in 1923; almost exactly at the same time that George Plimpton (1855–1936) was buying *his* Gower from

Bernard Quaritch Ltd. The period from the 1880s to the 1930s is often described as the Golden Age of American book collecting, when agents for Plimpton, for the Morgans, for Henry Huntington (1850–1927), for Robert Hoe III (1839–1909), and for other collectors too numerous to mention haunted the auction houses of Europe and America.²⁴ Whole libraries passed from one hand to another, as for example in Henry Huntington's dazzling purchase of the earl of Ellesmere's Bridgewater collections in 1917, for the sum of \$1,000,000.²⁵ American collectors competed with one another for choice items: George Plimpton was once outbid for a set of Queen Elizabeth's corsets by Henry Clay Folger (1857–1930), when the latter had the perspicacity to cable his bid rather than send it by letter. Folger is said to have reassured Plimpton by telling him that at least "the stays were safely in America."²⁶ It is perhaps this competitive atmosphere which explains the presence in the accession materials filed for Plimpton 265 of a cutting from a Maggs Bros. catalogue describing the manuscript which became M690.²⁷ Had Plimpton been considering an alternate purchase? Or was he tracking the purchases of others? We will never know, but in this context it is striking that the Morgan's curator pronounced the pencil drawings in MS M690 to be fifteenth century—from their costume alone I think it clear that they are not—and declared that they were intended to be portraits of Gower.²⁸ Compare that curator's assertions to this excerpt from a letter from the Quaritch firm to Plimpton:

I did not buy the manuscript which was sold at Sotheby's on July 25th and you will be interested to know that Rosenbach gave no less than £500 for it. . . . Compared with the manuscript that you bought from me, I should say that your manuscript is worth at least twice as much as the *Vox Clamantis*. It was not 14th century, but was written somewhere about 1430 or 1440 and one can not assume that the picture of the archer was the portrait of Gower.²⁹

Plimpton is being assured that he made a wise purchase; he may have only the dream miniature (rather than an author miniature), but the *Vox* miniature cannot be Gower (at least as taken from life) because it is too late.³⁰ Plimpton's manuscript wins on antiquity, then.³¹ The writer is probably also suggesting that Plimpton got a bargain in terms of price; he purchased his copy of the *Confessio* from Quaritch on 3 July 1924, and paid £450 for it (the marked price was £500). The letter, which also introduces Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach (1876–1952), an American bookdealer who was described in his

day as the Napoleon of Books and the Terror of the Auction Room,³² makes clear the competitive atmosphere surrounding the acquisition of manuscripts and thus allows one to understand the (desirable) dating of the Morgan manuscript drawings and the assertion that they represent Gower. The value of these objects rests in part, in other words, on their proximity to the “origin,” the poet Gower himself.³³

And that poet’s value to collectors is consistently asserted, as in the literary canon, by means of his relation to Chaucer. The description of Plimpton 265 in the Quaritch catalogue calls it “a splendid old English Manuscript, presenting a valuable text of the Poet who ranks next in importance to Chaucer in early English Literature.”³⁴ Rosenbach for his part described one of the *Confessio* manuscripts in his possession as containing a portrait “of the poet himself writing this book,” and described the work as one which “ranks only slightly below the *Canterbury Tales* in English literature.”³⁵ Here we see twin associations, then, with the author and with his *auctor* in the medieval sense, his guarantor of legitimacy. Bourdieu observes that “of all the objects offered for consumers’ choice, there are none more classifying than legitimate works of art, which, while distinctive in general, enable the production of distinctions ad infinitum by playing on divisions and sub-divisions into genres, periods, styles, authors, etc.”³⁶ Gower is exquisitely positioned to enact such distinctions: clearly canonical—an icon of high culture—and yet sufficiently esoteric as to require further identification.

While English books had always been popular with American collectors—a phenomenon I discuss further below—it is worth noting that the latter part of the “Golden Age” saw the growth of a “new taste for *all* early English books, the obscurer and rarer the better.”³⁷ Bernard Quaritch Sr. had anticipated such a demand as early as 1890, when he sent his son, Bernard Alfred Quaritch, on a tour of the United States.³⁸ A *Confessio* manuscript is among the items on the 1890 *Handlist of a Peerless Collection of Books and Manuscripts Exhibited to the Bibliophiles of America*.³⁹ The 1890 venture may not have produced an enormous volume of sales, but in the decades that followed, the Quaritch firm had considerable success in supplying the American taste for early English books.⁴⁰ Gower was one of the English writers who crossed the Atlantic as a result: at least three other *Confessio* manuscripts went to American homes through Quaritch Ltd.’s efforts.⁴¹

Another letter from Quaritch Ltd. to Plimpton (7 July 1924) details the dealer’s acquisition of Plimpton MS 265:

The Gower manuscript came from the Gatacre family, who live at Claverley in Shropshire. The circumstances in which I bought the manuscript were very peculiar. A Jewish dealer in Birmingham wrote to me and asked me to go to Birmingham when he would take me out to see a collection of books which he thought could be bought. From Birmingham he took me for a long drive in a motor car for some twenty or thirty miles, but did not divulge the name of the owner or even of the place where we were. I bought the books through him and it was only subsequently that I found out where I had been taken. The Gatacre family is, as you will see on reference to Burke's Landed Gentry, one of the oldest English families in existence and it is most probable that the volume had been in possession of the family since it was written. At the present moment I think the family is extremely poor and has parted with practically everything of value.⁴²

The manuscript, as described in the letter, has both snob and "originary" value in its association with "one of the oldest English families"; the exotic execution of the sale adds a delightful *frisson* of mystery to the acquisition. The reference to *Burke's* and the evocation of the ancient family's fall from wealth speak to a nostalgic sense of a bygone era. This nostalgia may have been a driving force in the wholesale American purchasing of the English past. Shaddy suggests:

It seems as if the birth of a modern, industrial world wreaked psychic havoc upon some individuals of the middle and upper-classes who coped with the disruptions by collecting books and manuscripts. Reaching across time and space, of course, could not postpone or thwart the "New Order," but it could provide a modicum of therapeutic relief.⁴³

A more pragmatic explanation for the American acquisition of English books is provided by Rosenbach's 1927 *Books and Bidders: The Adventures of a Bibliophile*. Referring to Britain's debtor status and America's wealth, he remarks that "rare books and the precious things of the collector follow the flow of gold," and he adds that the study of English letters at American universities contributes to a demand which *can only* be fulfilled in England.⁴⁴ But Rosenbach, too, offers a psychological as well as a practical assessment of American purchasers:

The bump of acquisitiveness is strongly developed in our collectors, and perhaps I know this as well as anyone. They like to exhibit their treasures as other mortals do, to show them to their envious friends with a twinkle in their eyes and a certain amount of deviltry. American amateurs, who have built railroads and great suspension bridges, who have been financial giants and captains of industry, must surely possess the red blood that made them thus.⁴⁵

Book collecting is here figured as the ultimate masculine and capitalist venture.⁴⁶ It does not require much imagination to hear a hint of smugness in Rosenbach's description of the sale of English culture to America:

During the last twenty years rare books and literary documents have left the shores of Albion at an alarming rate (for England). Most of them are now in the private and public libraries of the United States. I should hate to state how much I assisted in this magic exodus.⁴⁷

The competition is not merely between collectors, but between nations, and the nation in the ascendant shows its supremacy by its easy acquisition of the other's material objects of cultural capital.

But nostalgia, competition, and the commodification of culture do not tell the whole story of Plimpton 265's journey, and I do not mean to make Plimpton himself sound like a *naïf*. An irony in the letter's tactics is that Plimpton was not simply buying fetishes, trophies, or comfort-objects. A textbook publisher, he had a life-long interest in the history of education, and his collection was explicitly intended to trace that history, as his own published works on education in Chaucer's and Shakespeare's day make clear.⁴⁸ The presence of the *Confessio* in a collection with such an emphasis is obviously an important witness to the work's reception at one particular time. Yet no scholar today can experience Plimpton's collection as Plimpton organized it; one cannot of course browse the shelves, nor can one call up all 317 medieval and Renaissance volumes. Plimpton was not buying just any manuscript in 1924, but today's conditions elide the careful context he created for his *Confessio*. The manuscript lives now in air-conditioned splendor and, from the reader's point of view, isolation, and there is a way in which its past lives, with the Verneys and with Plimpton, have become mere footnotes in the provenance section of technical manuscript descriptions.

The archival conditions which control the modern use of medieval manuscripts, then, create a particular context for the reading of medieval texts and books. These necessary precautions impose distance and even create awe: the manuscript is foreign territory, in other words. The access to that territory is limited to those who can prove their citizenship of it—to shift Derrida’s metaphor, only the priests of the academy have access to the ark. Furthermore, the priesthood has its own hierarchies. The Manuscript Reading Room at the old British Museum library required a scholar to obtain a second reader’s pass, in addition to the usual British Library card, for manuscript access. The move to the new facility at St. Pancras has brought an apparent loosening of restriction through the abolition of the two-card system. The change to what is called “one-level admission” means that any reader may now request items in the Manuscript Room.⁴⁹ However, there are items designated “Select” which still require a reader to be “known” to the Library, either through the possession of one of the old passes, or through the letters of introduction and interviews which were required under the old system. Most of the library’s *Confessio* manuscripts are in this “Select” category. Further precautions are, quite reasonably, exercised for the “Z-Safe” items—BL Cotton Vitellius A.xv, the *Beowulf* manuscript, is in this category. There is, then, a tension between the principle of access and the practicalities of implementation. This is not to say that the British Library is denying access; indeed, I can write about the system in part because, on a recent visit, I saw the *Beowulf* manuscript being read at the desk next to mine. The reaction of other readers as they realized what the manuscript was—the reverential whispers that circulated around the room at the mere sight of it—suggest to me that the readers recognized the rarity of *both* the object and of its physical presence in the room. Access is privilege, and a self-conscious awareness of both limits and privileges helps explain the whispers in the Reading Room and the gleeful complicity in my opening anecdote. Furthermore, both access and the uses to which we put it shift constantly, in response to physical relocations of the archive, and to imaginative shifts in the determination of what it is that forms part of the archive. Caught in these physical and imagined spaces, the medieval book can still speak to us, but both our questions and their answers are necessarily contingent. This is not to say that our current institutional encounters are fruitless; one can in fact “read” both medieval books and modern archives. I want to return briefly to the evidence in Plimpton 265 and Morgan M690 for the responses of late medieval and early modern readers to Gower’s *Confessio*. The traces of these responses remind us of that vast territory between production and present context—and the treatment of this evidence, for its part, illuminates archival practice.

Apart from the names, scribbles, and doodles in Plimpton 265, this manuscript shows ample evidence of sustained reading over a long period of time. The bottom right corners of the folios show signs of frequent wear, and marks—single letters or numerals—in a postmedieval hand can be seen in these corners, suggesting some kind of numbering or access system. A fifteenth-century hand on folio 106v [128] has added some Latin comment. There are pointing hands next to a few stories, on folios 13v [21], 36v [48], and 135v [155]. Finally, running titles in Latin and English in an early-seventeenth-century hand suggest a conscious attempt to structure the first three books of the *Confessio* for consultation as a moral compendium. The names of the sins concerned are written in the appropriate place at the tops of the columns or in the margins.⁵⁰ The seventeenth-century annotator and Plimpton evidently shared a view about the didactic purposes of the text contained in this manuscript. These different kinds of marking taken together, then, suggest a pattern of organizational response to the text, a response which can be seen also in such extratextual features as the tables of contents with which Gower's first printers, Caxton in the fifteenth century and Berthelette in the sixteenth, provided his work.⁵¹

It is this latter process, of indexing the *Confessio*, which is suggested by the complete system of chapter markings, with subdivisions, throughout Morgan M690.⁵² These marks are in a medieval hand, and a medieval hand is also responsible for occasional directions and symbols at the bottom of folios intended to correct a misbinding. It seems that the scribe or a supervisor has checked the text against another copy. While the additions to Plimpton discussed above are made by later, casual readers, it seems most likely, on codicological grounds, that *this* effort at organization is made at the point of production.⁵³ This "professional" ordering of the text could be seen as a preemptive gesture, to direct or facilitate a reader's perusal of the *Confessio*.

The evidence of the pencil portraits in Morgan M690, although later and casual rather than professional, also indicates a response to the text, and an early modern reader may have directed or confirmed the twentieth-century curator's "reading" of this evidence. On the flyleaf [1r] on which one of the two pencil portraits occurs, a mid-sixteenth-century hand has written "John Gower wrott this bocke Poett Lawrrett." The phrase "Johon Gower Poete laureat" recurs twice more [1v, 2r]; in addition, the top of folio 36r reads, "Johan Gouer wrotte this Boocke with his owne hand," and 94r, "John Gouwer wrott Bocke with his oune hand a poett Lauriat per me William Meatcalfe." I know nothing about William Meatcalfe, but what I

can say from his attribution is that it was clearly considered important, by this sixteenth-century owner or reader, to declare the significance of the work through repeated appeal to Gower's canonical status.⁵⁴ The phrase "poet laureate" appears to be applied to Gower in, for example, the "poetis laureate" of James I, but while there are other *Confessio* manuscripts which contain later author ascriptions, none repeat the phrase "poet laureate."⁵⁵

The Morgan M690 ascription is of a similar date to Thomas Berthelette's first printed edition of the *Confessio* (1532), and it is striking that Berthelette asserts the importance of Gower to the project of national literary identity. Quoting Chaucer's famous direction of the *Troilus* to moral Gower, Berthelette observes:

By the whiche wordes of Chauser, we may also vnderstonde, that he and Gower were bothe of one selfe tyme, both excellently lerned, both great frendes to gether, and bothe alyke endeuoured them selfe and imployed theyr tyme so wel and so vertuously, that they dyd not onely passe forth their lyfes here ryght honourably; but also for their so doynge, so longe . . . as letters shal endure *and* continue, this noble royalme shall be the better.⁵⁶

Berthelette's edition is directed to Henry VIII, who will later, as noted above, confirm Gower's importance to the nation by exempting the poet from a printing ban.⁵⁷ Berthelette's own authority is suggested by a later owner's writing a mock-up of the title page from a 1554 reprint of the *Confessio* on a blank leaf at the opening of Glasgow, Glasgow University Library, MS Hunter 7. The writer of the ascription in Morgan M690, then, is like Berthelette in asserting Gower's place in the (national) canon. In so doing, he is also asserting the value of the manuscript. Indeed, it seems likely that when the M690 annotator says Gower wrote "this book . . . with his own hand" he may mean it quite literally. I return to the Quaritch firm writing to Plimpton or Rosenbach describing his *Confessio* manuscript: William Meacalfe is asserting proximity to the author as part of what is special about the manuscript. And the early-twentieth-century curator follows in the sixteenth-century annotator's footsteps by dating the portrait heads to the early fifteenth century, moving them closer to the point of origin.

From one curator, I now turn to another, and return to Plimpton 265. When the Plimpton collection passed, shortly before the collector's death, to Columbia University, the curator of the time, Samuel Ives, set about (re)foliating it. Ives, observing that leaves of the manuscript were

missing, foliated to take account of the absent leaves; so the foliation would skip from 5 to 10, let us say. In other words, he foliated according to an idea, not of an urtext, but of an urmanuscript, as a witness to an “original” condition. This practice suggests an understanding of a manuscript as a thing in itself. By contrast, older foliations of some British Library manuscripts sometimes skip blank pages, even when they occur medially: here the manuscript is conceived to have an original *purpose*, which is to carry a text.⁵⁸ Both of these idiosyncratic approaches now provoke horror in curatorial circles, but the point I am making here is that foliation, an institutional practice we tend to take completely for granted, has something to say about how the manuscript object was (and is) understood at a particular time.

The assumptions guiding foliation can also affect the work of later generations. Ives, for example, assumed that the presence of stubs indicated subtraction rather than addition. A. J. Bliss comments on the confusion created by this assumption in the foliation of manuscripts with inserts: “the Ives Catalogue . . . gives the false impression that a number of folios are ‘missing,’ though the text is continuous throughout.”⁵⁹ A new foliation of Plimpton 265 in June of 1998 follows current practice in numbering the folios continuously, but the concerns manifested in the varieties of foliation practice with respect to presence or absence stand in arresting counterpoint to Berthelette’s comments on the state of Gower’s text as he found it in preparing his 1532 edition:

And farthermore there were lefte out in dyuers places of the warke lynes and columnes, ye and sometyme holle padges; whiche caused, that this mooste pleasunt and easy auctor coude not wel be perceyued . . . and what can be a greater blemysse vnto a noble auctor? And . . . the great lernynge of this auctour . . . ye shall yourselfe nowe deme, whan ye shall se hym (as nere as I can) sette forth in his owne shappe and lykenes.⁶⁰

His own shape and likeness—John Gower wrote this book with his own hand; and these portraits are clearly fifteenth-century and intended to be Gower; and Plimpton 265 is foliated to indicate what is missing; and to extend from the curatorial to the editorial practice Berthelette also invokes, the present text is based on the best manuscripts. Everywhere, in other words, we see the wish to move a manuscript and/or the text it contains closer to its origin. And this desire can lead to the submerging or erasure of the signs of passage from those originary hands to our own.

To illustrate this point, I turn to another common institutional practice, the publishing of exhibition catalogues and websites. The 1985 *Treasures* exhibition catalogue description of the Plimpton MS reads in part: “John Gower was a contemporary and acquaintance of Chaucer, and, although his poetic gifts did not equal Chaucer’s, he stands as a major figure in the history of literature who helped mold his Middle English dialect into the national literary language.”⁶¹ One hears the echo of Berthelette or of booksellers’ catalogues: in the absence of a commercial impulse, Gower’s poetic accomplishments are downplayed, but the emphasis on origin and proximity remain. The admirable discussion of Plimpton’s collection as a whole is in a completely different part of the catalogue, the “Collections” section. The catalogue thus divides the “treasures” from at least one of their contexts, so that the Plimpton Gower is described chiefly in terms of its origin rather than its history—in terms of Gower rather than Plimpton (or the Verneys, for that matter). The privileging of origins is one of the links, then, between sixteenth-century readers and the sellers, buyers, and curators of the first part of this century and today.

In the Pierpont Morgan Library, too, one encounters practices which effectively transform one archive into another. In addition to MS M690, the Morgan also owns one of only two *Confessio* manuscripts with a full set of illustrations.⁶² I was unable to see this manuscript, Morgan M126, on my recent visit, because it was being conserved. I consider the fact that this copy has an alphabetical index even more interesting than the fact that it is illustrated, and I wanted to know what color the index and its subdivisions were.⁶³ The microfilm is black and white, and the file of color photographs concentrates on the miniatures; text is represented in color when it occurs with a painting. The archival record alone, then, could not answer my question in the absence of the manuscript.

There are two points to be made here, the first concerning the transmission of the archive, and the second, the burial of previous archives. In the first instance, the Morgan Library is hardly alone in placing emphasis on the images in its manuscripts. I have been drawing attention throughout this discussion to the hierarchies and assumptions implicit in the cataloguing and describing of medieval manuscripts. The division of labor which has been customary in the study of medieval literary manuscripts, with bibliographers and archivists on one side and literary editors and critics on the other, can make it difficult for an individual to use written or photographic records to approach the totality of the manuscript. An editor such as G. C. Macaulay, whose magisterial 1900 edition is still the only scholarly edition of the *Con-*

fessio, naturally concentrates on text.⁶⁴ The needs of art historians are addressed in part through media such as the Morgan's file of color photographs. The ephemera of provenance and ownership may (or may not) appear in catalogue records and accession files. But none of these channels of transmission is sufficient in itself to allow one to capture the whole book.

Digital technology promises to broaden access—visual if not tactile—to medieval manuscripts, perhaps thus loosening the terms of the house arrest I have been describing. The ongoing scanning of the British Library's collection-based manuscript catalogues will make searching those catalogues much easier, for example, thus perhaps encouraging more scholars to make use of manuscripts in their work.⁶⁵ Manuscripts, too, are being scanned—the digitizing of the *Beowulf* manuscript puts high-quality images into far more hands than would ever be allowed to touch the manuscript itself.⁶⁶ But scanning might also take the manuscripts themselves out of the hands—and here I speak quite literally—of scholars. Participants at the recent Early Book Society meeting at Glasgow were torn between admiration for the gloriously detailed digital images of two Gutenberg bibles made available through Keio University's *HUMI Project*, and fear that the possibility of such scans would one day make it all but impossible for most scholars to touch original manuscripts.⁶⁷

It is also the case that traditional hierarchies continue to have an effect even in the world of this new technology: in the absence of physical barriers, imaginative barriers remain. A tour of some current web-based projects suggests a tension between the immediate appeal of decoration and the recognition that medieval manuscripts are more than their pictures. Magnificent displays which fall into the former category include the Bibliothèque Nationale de France's massive exhibition *Le roi Charles V et son temps*, mounted in 1996, and the beautifully organized *Hundred Highlights from the Koninklijke Bibliotheek* in the Netherlands.⁶⁸ There are many beautiful images here, but they are of parts of manuscripts only, and the parts that are chosen for display are the picture pages. In the case of the BN's exhibition, the pages which include the images are often cropped so that almost no text is visible. One cannot help but think of the mutilation which many medieval manuscripts suffered for their illuminations. Morgan M126 had nine of its miniatures removed, and six of the missing leaves in the Plimpton MS would have begun book-sections of the *Confessio* and thus could well have been removed for their decoration.⁶⁹ Clearly digital cropping is not, as is a razor-blade, literally damaging; but the encouragement which it gives to think only of the pictures in manuscripts is clear.

Even when full pages are displayed, it is often because of their images. The WebMuseum's display of the *Très Riches Heures* of Jean, duc de Berry, for example, presents only the calendar pages of that manuscript. The WebMuseum's welcome page for the *Très Riches Heures* exhibit notes that "the original Riches Heures manuscript is stored in the Chantilly museum, but is so degraded that it is no longer available to the public . . . except for WebMuseum visitors!"⁷⁰ Those visitors will, however, gain little sense of the real form of this manuscript.

Perhaps it is not surprising that projects aimed at the larger public focus on famous manuscripts and their pictures, but the Morgan Library's file of photographs suggests that, at least until recently, a similar tendency has existed in the dissemination of the manuscript archive to scholars. For example, manuscript facsimiles often concentrate on famous authors or beautiful manuscripts; some facsimiles of highly decorated manuscripts are so expensive as to be designated "rare books" themselves. There are signs that in the digital age such an approach may be changing, however, and Columbia University offers one of the most interesting examples of the shift. The on-line exhibition *Images from Medieval and Renaissance Manuscripts*, containing a hundred images, mounted by the Rare Books and Manuscript Library, offers one image, with a detail, of Plimpton 265; the page chosen is the page with the illustration of Nebuchadnezzar's dream.⁷¹ However, the recent *Digital Scriptorium* project being jointly undertaken by the Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley, and the Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Columbia, while it still concentrates on selected pages, seems to have different criteria for selection.⁷² The twelve folios of Plimpton 265 which have been scanned, for example, include the pastedown from an earlier religious manuscript on folio 1r, the figure of Laodamia, the comment about good penmanship, the signature of Edward Bromley, and the red crayon loops and daisies (so far the soup ring has escaped reproduction).⁷³ Directed explicitly at a scholarly audience, the *Digital Scriptorium* project thus emphasizes the kind of material which is of interest to current manuscript studies. Yet it still offers only detached folios. Digitization is expensive, and the dream of access to complete manuscripts is some way away. Nevertheless, here too there is movement; the contrast between the Bodleian Library's 1994 *Towards an Image Catalogue* and its current venture, *Early Manuscripts at Oxford University*, is striking.⁷⁴ The former is a miscellaneous collection of mostly decorated individual folios; the latter offers access to complete manuscripts. These include a manuscript of the *Canterbury Tales* (Oxford, Corpus Christi College MS 198) and of the B-

text of *Piers Plowman* (Corpus Christi College MS 201).⁷⁵ It would perhaps be churlish to note that, while there are large-scale, computer-based projects ongoing for both Chaucer and Langland, Gower remains bound between the covers of the Macaulay edition and locked behind the doors of manuscript libraries.⁷⁶ Instead, I want to turn to the second observation occasioned by the Morgan Library's practice, and that is the submerging of previous archives.

I am thinking here of the Morgan's wall of black binders of photographs and catalogue notes. These binders do provide an invaluable record of the Morgan collection, and the Morgan's practices are offered here simply as an instance of a more general approach. I am concerned with what are probably *inevitable* consequences of the passage of a collection from one owner to another, or of the transformation of one archive into another *kind* of archive. The catalogue and photograph volumes which line the reading room at the Morgan are the closest one can now come to J. P. Morgan's exuberant collecting practice. The man who bought whole libraries, saying "What's the use of bothering about one little piece when I might get them all?" is now represented through these fragments, as he must be, because his collection must live behind its locked doors.⁷⁷ Similarly submerged are the taste and practices of the collectors whose libraries Morgan acquired, and once again past archives and past readers are buried, to be excavated only with great difficulty. Adrian Joline, the less celebrated collector mentioned above, continued his lament for his books by observing that after their inevitable dispersal, "My own association with them will be lost and forgotten."⁷⁸ Morgan and Plimpton may have given their names to their collections, but the archives so named are now no longer in a form either man would recognize.

Morgan, Plimpton, the Verneys with their crayons and pins, William Meatcalfe with his pencil, Ravensworth with his sense of responsibility—I have been trying to write them back into their books, to show the importance of all the moments between scribal workshop and research library. I have also been tracing (by implication) what happens to a text that is contained in a manuscript—a material object of cultural capital. We treat these museum items with great (if necessary) reverence, and seem somehow to have absorbed as well the idea that they need to be "worthy" of such treatment, of the price we pay for them, of the attention we pay them. There are common threads in this assessment of worth from the sixteenth to the twentieth century: a *Confessio* manuscript is valuable by being close in time to Gower; by containing Gower, who is understood (by those with sufficient

powers of discrimination) as co-founder with Chaucer of the English literary tradition; and by being handsome. In concentrating on the material evidence and surroundings of a few medieval manuscripts, I have tried to suggest the many ways in which our attempts to bridge the gaps between ourselves and our medieval books and texts are managed and directed. By tracing the outlines of others' encounters with these manuscripts—in the surroundings of an English country house, a Victorian castle, the sales floors of London book merchants, the libraries of American collectors and universities—I hope to have answered, for Gower at least, Jerome McGann's appeal that we use bibliography to give our texts "a local habitation and a name."⁷⁹



Notes

This essay deals with the history and practices of archives, and would have been impossible without the generous help of archivists and librarians in the U.S. and the U.K. None of what follows in my argument is intended to suggest any lack of gratitude on my part for their efforts to facilitate scholars' encounters with medieval books. I would like to thank Brett Dolman, Consuelo Dutschke, Tony Edwards, Alex Gillespie, Richard Linenthal, Peter Robinson, and Robert Shaddy for answering some of my many questions as I worked on this article. Thanks as well to Pete Wetherbee, Michael Cornett, and Sarah Beckwith for their helpful responses to the finished piece.

- 1 Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 3.
- 2 Ibid., 2.
- 3 Indeed, such over-the-shoulder viewing is discouraged in many archives, where exclusive reading is the norm.
- 4 Quoted in Robert Shaddy, "A World of Sentimental Attachments: The Cult of Collecting, 1890–1930," *The Book Collector* 43 (1994): 190.
- 5 And more widely—examples of restricted access can be drawn from any period and field. The implications of such restrictions have recently been explored in fictionalized form in A. S. Byatt's *Possession: A Romance* (New York: Random House, 1990).
- 6 D. F. McKenzie, *Bibliography and the Sociology of Texts* (London: The British Library, 1986), 5 and 4 respectively.
- 7 Ibid., 51.
- 8 There are nine *Confessio* manuscripts in the British Library, six of them with painted borders and initials making liberal use of gold. These include the magnificent MS Harley 7184, a huge (21.5" × 14.5") and ornate manuscript with elaborate, well-painted initials and borders.
- 9 Or for many early modern texts as well. In both periods, while well-known authors and well-known manuscripts are made accessible by finding-aids such as bibliographic

studies and by manuscript substitutes such as facsimiles and microfilm, the bulk of the manuscript material produced in both periods is still catalogued in local, and therefore idiosyncratic, ways. As Michael Cornett has recently pointed out, even when microfilm collections of this material exist, it can be next to impossible to locate a specific work, and sometimes even a whole microfilm collection, through present library catalogues. See Michael Cornett, "Working the Early Modern British Archive: Some Problems and Solutions of Access with a Checklist of Microfilm Sources," *The Ben Jonson Journal: Literary Contexts in the Age of Elizabeth, James, and Charles 5* (1998): 167–200.

- 10 For a useful discussion of Gower's literary reputation, see Derek Pearsall, "The Gower Tradition," in *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, ed. Alastair J. Minnis (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Brewer, 1983), 179–97. Pearsall argues that Chaucer's use of the epithet "moral" to describe Gower has a great deal to do with both his popularity and its subsequent decline (179–81).
- 11 The *Acte for thaduancement of true Religion and for thabolishment of the contrarie* exempts "translucations of the Pater noster, the Aue Maria and the Crede, the psalters prymer prayer statutes and lawes of the Realme, Cronycles Canterburye tales, Chaucers bokes Gowers bokes and stories of mennes lieues." *Statutes of the Realm*, vol. 3 (London, 1817), 895; repr. in *Chaucer: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Derek Brewer, vol. 1 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), 98. Thanks to Alex Gillespie for drawing this act to my attention.
- 12 Berthelette's 1554 edition is a reprint of the printer's 1532 edition of the *Confessio*, reprinted again in Alexander Chalmers, *The Works of the English Poets, from Chaucer to Cowper; including the Series Edited with Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, by Dr. Samuel Johnson: and The Most Approved Translations*, vol. 2 (London, 1810).
- 13 Henry J. Todd, *Illustrations of the Lives and Writings of Gower and Chaucer collected from authentick documents* (London, 1810), xxvi–xxvii.
- 14 Scribe D is also found in London, University Library, MS V.88 (*Piers Plowman*); London, British Library, Additional MS 27944 (Trevisa); BL MS Harley 7334 (*Canterbury Tales*); Oxford, Corpus Christi College MS 198 (*Canterbury Tales*); and these manuscripts of the *Confessio*: Cambridge, Trinity College Library, MS R.3.2; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 294 and Bodley 902; Oxford, Corpus Christi College MS 67; Oxford, Christ Church MS 148; London, British Library, MS Egerton 1991; and Princeton, University Library, Robert H. Taylor Collection MS 5. Scribe D's work, and its implications for the study of the book trade in fifteenth-century London, are discussed in M. B. Parkes and A. I. Doyle, "The Production of Copies of the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio Amantis* in the Early Fifteenth Century," in *Medieval Scribes, Manuscripts, and Libraries: Essays Presented to N. R. Ker*, ed. M. B. Parkes and A. G. Watson (London: Scolar Press, 1978), 163–210. The essay is reprinted, with some additions and revisions, in *Scribes, Scripts, and Readers: Studies in the Communication, Presentation, and Dissemination of Medieval Texts* (London: Hambledon, 1991), 201–48.
- 15 I discuss the design of *Confessio* manuscripts, and the variations and implications of that design, in "With Carmen's Help: Latin Authorities in the *Confessio Amantis*," *Studies in Philology* 95 (1998): 1–41. The most complete discussion of the owner-

- ship of *Confessio* manuscripts is in Kate D. Harris, "Ownership and Readership: Studies in the Provenance of the Manuscripts of Gower's *Confessio Amantis*" (Ph.D. diss., University of York, 1993). She discusses the association of a cluster of *Confessio* manuscripts with Henry IV and his sons (119–56). It should be noted that these include Christ Church MS 148 and Bodley 294 (the latter probably belonging to Humphrey, Duke of Gloucester), both of which are, like Plimpton 265, copies by Scribe D.
- 16 As discussed below, the manuscript was refoliated in June of 1998. I have preserved the older foliation in square brackets, as it is this foliation which appears on microfilm copies of the manuscript.
 - 17 See Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 250, on the "supreme fetish."
 - 18 By G. C. Macaulay, in *The Complete Works of John Gower*, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899–1902). The *Confessio* occupies volumes 2 and 3.
 - 19 Manuscripts and archives need to be protected, and I am extremely grateful that so many archivists and librarians over the centuries have taken such care of these precious materials. This essay is an exploration of the social reality generated by the modern preservationist environment; it does not at all advocate the reconfiguration of that environment, but only an awareness of the ways in which the environment can affect scholarly work, from the topics one chooses to study to the attitudes one brings to that study.
 - 20 Alberto Manguel, *A History of Reading* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 1996), 125.
 - 21 Nicholas A. Basbanes, *A Gentle Madness: Bibliophiles, Bibliomanes, and the Eternal Passion for Books* (New York: Henry Holt, 1995), 4–5.
 - 22 Henry Todd invokes this belief in his *Illustrations*, referring to "the proud tradition in the Marquis of Stafford's family," xxi. John Fisher reviews and dismisses the evidence for this connection, showing the more likely connections between Gower and a good Kentish family of the same name, while also raising other possibilities; see his *John Gower: Moral Philosopher and Friend of Chaucer* (New York: New York University Press, 1964), 37 ff.
 - 23 The 1764 transcript was produced for Granville Leveson-Gower, 2nd Earl Gower and (1768) 1st Marquess of Stafford. The transcript is now London, British Library, Additional MS 59496. The Roxburghe Club edition was by George Granville Leveson-Gower, Earl Gower and later 2nd Duke of Sutherland.
 - 24 Carl L. Cannon christens the period thus in his *American Book Collectors and Collecting from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: H. W. Wilson, 1941), 142. Cannon refers to the period from the late 1880s to 1914, but a more recent review of the period is in Robert Alan Shaddy, "'A Mad World, My Masters!': Book Collecting in America, 1890–1930" (Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri-Columbia, 1991), which extends the period to 1930.
 - 25 The collection included 4,400 printed books and over 14,000 manuscripts and letters. The purchase is detailed in Donald C. Dickinson, *Henry E. Huntington's Library of Libraries* (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1995), 102–5. A particularly fine *Confessio* manuscript, Huntington MS El 26 A 17 (the Ellesmere-Stafford MS), was part of this massive purchase.

- 26 The anecdote is recounted in Cannon, *American Book Collectors*, 338.
- 27 There is no bibliographic information on this scrap beyond the page number, 143, but it must come from *Maggs Cat. 456*, 1924, item no. 184, which is describing Morgan M690.
- 28 Pierpont Morgan Library, catalogue entries. These are very sketchy portraits, but one head is clearly wearing a ruff, while the other's pointed, lace-edged collar suggests Cavalier costume. Both figures are bare-headed, with shoulder-length hair. The sixteenth-century "poet laureate" inscriptions discussed below usually accommodate the doodles, although the descender of the letter *p* on the inscription on folio 1v crosses the hair of the figure. Thus the inscriptions postdate the drawings, although whether by minutes or decades it is impossible to say.
- 29 Dated 5 August 1924. The letter is preserved at Columbia University Library in the accession files relating to the manuscript. Thanks to Consuelo Dutschke for allowing me to see this material. It is most likely to have been written by E. H. Dring (1864–1928), managing director of Quaritch until his death, and the member of the firm who dealt at this time with medieval manuscripts. I am most grateful to Richard Linenthal of Bernard Quaritch Ltd. for this information and for the purchase information which follows.
- 30 The other common miniature in *Confessio* manuscripts is of the Confessor and Amans, and while Amans is normally presented as a stereotypically young lover, there are three miniatures in which Amans is an old man, seemingly intended to suggest Gower: these are Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS Bodley 902 and MS Fairfax 3 (the latter with a collar of linked *S*'s); and Cambridge, Pembroke College MS 307. In addition, there are two manuscripts with author portraits: these are Philadelphia, Rosenbach Museum and Library, Rosenbach Foundation MS 1083/29, and Princeton University Library, Taylor MS 5. As the letter suggests, the archer figure found in some manuscripts of the *Vox Clamantis* was sometimes also understood to represent Gower. For the most complete discussion of the miniatures in the *Confessio* manuscripts, see Jeremy Griffiths, "'Confessio Amantis': The Poem and Its Pictures," in *Gower's Confessio Amantis: Responses and Reassessments*, 163–78; and Joel Fredell, "Reading the Dream Miniature in the *Confessio Amantis*," *Medievalia et Humanistica* n.s. 22 (1995): 61–93.
- 31 It is a nice irony that in fact the Plimpton Gower is one of scribe D's later products, and therefore not quite fourteenth-century. D's career is thought to have spanned about thirty years, with the Trinity Gower, which can be no later than 1426, as the *ante quem*; see Parkes in *Scribes, Scripts, and Readers*, 233–34. As for the *Vox* manuscript mentioned here, it is the manuscript which became San Marino, Huntington Library, MS HM 150 (the Ecton-Sotheby manuscript); this most likely *is* a fourteenth-century product, dated by Macaulay to the end of the fourteenth century (*Complete Works*, 4:lxv).
- 32 In the *New Yorker* and the London tabloids respectively; see Leslie A. Morris, "A. S. W. Rosenbach," in *American Book Collectors and Bibliographers* (Detroit: Gale, 1994), 220. The image of conquest is a popular one; Bernard Quaritch was described as the "Emperor of the Sales Room" (Leslie A. Morris, "Bernard Alfred Quaritch in America," *The Book Collector* 46 [1997]: 180). Bernard Alfred was the senior Quaritch's son, but the epithet is here applied to Bernard senior.

- 33 Shaddy records many anecdotes exemplifying how American collectors of the period desired to touch the origins of their books; autograph and association copies were particularly popular. See “A World of Sentimental Attachments,” 185–200. This desire for the stamp of origin may explain the emphasis here and in the Rosenbach catalogue description discussed below on portraits.
- 34 *Bernard Quaritch's Catalogue*, cat. 344, item 16.
- 35 *The Collected Catalogues of Dr. A. S. W. Rosenbach (1904–1951) in Ten Volumes*, ed. Don Ward (New York: Arno, 1967), vol. 7, cat. 45, item 368. Rosenbach handled two *Confessio* manuscripts with author portraits; one is now the Princeton Taylor MS, while the other is Rosenbach Foundation MS 1083/29.
- 36 Bourdieu, *Distinction*, 16.
- 37 Nicholas A. Barker, “Bernard Quaritch,” *The Book Collector* 46 (1997): 21.
- 38 The trip is described in Morris, “Bernard Alfred Quaritch in America,” 180–97.
- 39 The description is very brief—the manuscript is a small folio, with one miniature, containing a first-recension text. A process of elimination suggests that this is most likely to be the manuscript which is now New York, Pierpont Morgan Library, MS Morgan M125. The manuscript was priced at \$1,250. When the sale actually took place, however, is unclear. Thanks to Richard Linenthal of Bernard Quaritch Ltd. for supplying me with a copy of the relevant page from the 1890 *Handlist*.
- 40 Morris notes that few manuscripts or incunabula were sold during the 1890 tour (“Bernard Alfred Quaritch in America,” 195).
- 41 Two of these are also Morgan manuscripts, M125 and M126. The third is Princeton University Library, Garrett MS 136. Maggs Bros., too, sent more *Confessio* manuscripts to America; in addition to Morgan M690, the manuscript now known as Washington, D.C., Folger Shakespeare Library, Folger MS Sm 1 (*olim* Phillipps 8942) passed through Maggs's hands (and many others). Rosenbach, while he kept one of his *Confessio* manuscripts, let another go, eventually to become the Princeton Taylor MS. He also sold a copy of the *Vox Clamantis*, now Huntington MS HM 150, to Huntington in 1924.
- 42 This letter is affixed to the inside cover of Plimpton 265.
- 43 Shaddy, “A World of Sentimental Attachments,” 200.
- 44 A. S. W. Rosenbach, *Books and Bidders: The Adventures of a Bibliophile* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1927), 246, 260. The chapter is called “Why America Buys England's Books.”
- 45 *Ibid.*, 254.
- 46 American collectors of the period often saw themselves as hunters; Robert Shaddy collects many examples in “Collectors on the Prowl: Images of Book Hunting in America, 1890–1930,” *The McNeese Review* 33 (1990–94): 58–79.
- 47 Rosenbach, *Books and Bidders*, 248.
- 48 See George Arthur Plimpton, *The Education of Chaucer Illustrated from the Schoolbooks in Use in His Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1935); and Plimpton, *The Education of Shakespeare Illustrated from the Schoolbooks in Use in His Time* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1933). Both of these books, aimed at a fairly general audience, were illustrated with plates of manuscripts in Plimpton's own collection. An address to the American Antiquarian Society is reprinted as a pamphlet entitled *The*

Hornbook and Its Use in America (Worcester, Mass.: repr. from the Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society for October 1916).

- 49 The information on access at the British Library which follows is based on my own observations, but the policy arrived at, the terminology for access, and the actual implementation of the policy have been explained to me by Brett Dolman, Reading Room Manager of Manuscript Collections, to whom I am most grateful. Mr. Dolman observed in one of our exchanges that the ongoing process of surveying the manuscript collections over the past few years has resulted in many more items being upgraded to “Select” status; he also notes that the policy is under constant review.
- 50 I refer to the Plimpton annotator’s bilingual practice briefly in “With Carmen’s Help,” 11.
- 51 For a discussion of these tables, see my “Pretex: Tables of Contents and the Reading of John Gower’s *Confessio Amantis*,” *Medium Ævum* 66 (1997): 270–87.
- 52 The markings consist of *Cm* for *capitulum*, followed by numerals, with letters for subdivisions.
- 53 Morgan M690 has one quire in a second hand, fols. 153r–160v. A one-column stub is inserted before 161r, and on it the text continues in the main hand. The stub was perhaps necessary because the column layout in the anomalous quire does not match that of the rest of the manuscript. The anomalous quire lacks the numbering system; when the system picks up again on 161r, it has taken account of the sections in the anomalous quire. It seems unlikely, then, that a later hand would number all but this one quire. The fact that the producer seems to have counted the sections but not gone back to number those in the anomalous quire may imply a degree of haste in the production.
- 54 Kate Harris, “Ownership and Readership,” says nothing of Metcalfe, and I have been unable to make a convincing identification myself. Harris does speculate that the attribution of manuscripts to Gower, something which appears fairly early in several copies, might suggest the presence of these copies in institutional libraries (220 n. 24).
- 55 The reference is to Chaucer and Gower; the *Kingis Quair* dates to 1423. Another example is the “morall Gower, and Ludgate laureate” of Dunbar (*The Goldyn Targe*, 1508, l. 262). Our modern use of “poet laureate” is later in date. The *OED* cites Ben Jonson as the first poet laureate in this sense, noting that the title was first applied to Davenant, his successor, in 1638.
- 56 *Jo. Gower de Confessione Amantis*, ed. Thomas Berthelette (London, 1532), sig. 2a3v.
- 57 Berthelette’s edition is discussed at length in Tim William Machan, “Thomas Berthelette and Gower’s *Confessio*,” *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 18 (1996): 143–66. The year 1532 also saw the printing of William Thynne’s *Workes of Chaucer*, and Joseph Dane notes that here, too, there is a dedication to Henry, one which makes of the king an “ideally perfect Chaucerian, whose authority is equal to Chaucer’s own”; *Who Is Buried in Chaucer’s Tomb? Studies in the Reception of Chaucer’s Book* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1998), 38.
- 58 My thanks to the members of the discussion list Electronic Access to Medieval Manuscripts, who generously shared with me their anecdotes and musings about foliation past and present.

- 59 A. J. Bliss, "Two Hilton Manuscripts in Columbia University Library," *Medium Ævum* 38 (1969): 158. My thanks to Consuelo Dutschke for supplying me with this reference.
- 60 Berthelette, *Jo. Gower de Confessio Amantis*, sig. 2a3v.
- 61 *The Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Columbia University: Collections and Treasures*, edited by Rudolph Ellenbogen, <http://www.columbia.edu/acis/textarchive/rare/>, s.v. item 12 on John Gower, *Confessio Amantis*. For the print version, see Kenneth A. Lohf and Rudolph Ellenbogen, eds., *The Rare Book and Manuscript Library of Columbia University: Collections and Treasures* (New York: Columbia University Libraries, 1985).
- 62 The other is Oxford, New College MS 266.
- 63 It is unique among surviving *Confessio* manuscripts in this respect.
- 64 Although it is a tribute to Macaulay's energy and industry that one can also glean information about decoration and provenance from his descriptions, my point is that he is less thorough with respect to these manuscript features than he is when describing the text that each manuscript contains.
- 65 The librarian at the British Library who showed me the new on-line manuscript catalogues this past summer believed that the number of readers using manuscript materials was already up, probably because one no longer needed to learn all the intricacies of the old catalogues in order to browse manuscript material. In a similar vein, Cornett remarks that the database access now available to the *English Short Title Catalogue* and its associated microfilm collections "is transforming research by allowing scholars to concentrate their energies on the contents of books themselves rather than on the arduous process of identifying and locating them" ("Working the Early Modern British Archive," 175).
- 66 An on-line guide to the *Electronic Beowulf*, including early scans and commentary, may be found at <http://www.uky.edu/%7Ekiernan/eBeowulf/main.htm>. The images themselves are available on CD-ROMs as *The Electronic Beowulf*, ed. Kevin S. Kieran (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999).
- 67 *HUMI: Humanities Media Interface Project*; the *Online Digital Facsimile* of the Gutenberg bibles are at <http://www.humi.keio.ac.jp/treasures/incunabula/B42/index.htm>. The scans are of two complete copies of the 40-line first impression printed by Gutenberg, one the Keio University copy, and the other from Cambridge University. The images are of extremely high quality, allowing one to discern the different pigments and density of the paint used in the decoration, for example.
- 68 For the BN exhibition, see <http://www.bnf.fr/enluminures/accueil.htm>. For the exhibition from the Koninklijke Bibliotheek, see <http://www.konbib.nl/100hoogte/hh-en.html>.
- 69 Known as the Frere miniatures, these have now been restored to the Morgan manuscript. The missing leaves of the Plimpton MS would have opened the Prologue and Books I, II, IV, V, and VI. The fact that illuminated borders survive to open all other books, and that fol. 53r, the opening of Book V, has enough stump left to show that a border was present, makes it likely that these leaves were removed for their decoration.
- 70 For the display from the *Très Riches Heures*, see <http://metalab.unc.edu/wm/rh/>.

- 71 See the Columbia University Library exhibition at <http://www.columbia.edu/cu/libraries/indiv/rare/images/img0060/>.
- 72 See the *Digital Scriptorium* project at <http://sunsite.berkeley.edu/Scriptorium/>. The plan is to digitize over 10,000 images, with at least one image from every medieval and early Renaissance document held by the two libraries. *Digital Scriptorium* is also cooperating with ongoing efforts to devise a standard for on-line manuscript descriptions. *Electronic Access to Medieval Manuscripts* (<http://www.csbsju.edu/hmml/eamms/>) is a collaboration between the Hill Monastic Manuscript Library at St. John's University, Collegeville, Minn., and the Vatican Film Library at St. Louis University; while the *MASTER* project (*Manuscript Access through Standards for Electronic Records*) is working on establishing a union catalogue of all manuscripts in European libraries (see <http://www.cta.dmu.ac.uk/projects/master/>).
- 73 All these images may be found at [http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/dlo?obj=COLUMBIA.DS.\[8282, 8290, 8291, and 8294\]&size=small](http://www.columbia.edu/cgi-bin/dlo?obj=COLUMBIA.DS.[8282,8290,8291,8294]&size=small).
- 74 For *Towards an Image Catalogue*, see <http://www.rsl.ox.ac.uk/imacat.html>. For *Early Manuscripts at Oxford University*, see <http://image.ox.ac.uk/>.
- 75 At <http://image.ox.ac.uk/pages/corpus/ms198~1/main.htm> and <http://image.ox.ac.uk/pages/corpus/ms201~1/main.htm> respectively.
- 76 See Norman Blake and Peter Robinson's *Canterbury Tales Project* (<http://www.shef.ac.uk/uni/projects/ctp/>), and Hoyt N. Duggan's *Piers Plowman Electronic Archive* (<http://jefferson.village.virginia.edu/piers/>).
- 77 Morgan is quoted in Ruth Rosenberg, "John Pierpont Morgan and John Pierpont Morgan, Jr.," in *American Book Collectors and Bibliographers* (Detroit: Gale, 1994), 166.
- 78 Quoted in Shaddy, "A World of Sentimental Attachments," 190.
- 79 Jerome J. McGann, *The Textual Condition* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 15.