The complete works of John Gower, volume 2 : $b The English works

John Gower

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Transcriber’s Notes

Obvious typographical errors in punctuation have been silently corrected.

In particular, these typos were corrected:

Page cxxxii - corrected respcet to respect Page 477 - corrected “feminine from” to “feminine form” in note 2677. Page 481 - corrected “too” to “two” in note 390. Footnote 1275 - Added “margin” to linenote for line 2052

The Corrigenda et Addenda have been corrected in place.

All other spelling and punctuation remains unchanged.

Italics are represented thus _italic_, superscripts thus y^n, bold thus =bold=.

THE COMPLETE WORKS

OF

JOHN GOWER

G. C. MACAULAY

* * THE ENGLISH WORKS

HENRY FROWDE, M.A.

PUBLISHER TO THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

LONDON, EDINBURGH, AND NEW YORK

THE COMPLETE WORKS

OF

JOHN GOWER

EDITED FROM THE MANUSCRIPTS WITH INTRODUCTIONS, NOTES, AND GLOSSARIES

BY

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* * THE ENGLISH WORKS

(CONFESSIO AMANTIS, PROL.--LIB. V. 1970)

‘O gentile Engleterre, a toi j’escrits.’

Oxford
AT THE CLARENDON PRESS
1901

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PRINTER TO THE UNIVERSITY

PREFATORY NOTE

The circumstances under which this edition was undertaken have already been stated in the Preface to the volume containing the French Works, where mention is also made of the editor's obligations to many librarians and private owners of manuscripts.

At present it need only be said that the editor has become more and more convinced, as his work went on, of the value and authentic character of the text given by the Fairfax MS. of the _Confessio Amantis_, which as proceeding directly from the author, though not written by his hand, may claim the highest rank as an authority for his language.

It is hoped that the list of errata, the result chiefly of a revision made during the formation of the Glossary, may be taken to indicate not so much the carelessness of the editor, as his desire to be absolutely accurate in the reproduction of this interesting text.

The analysis of the _Confessio Amantis_ which is printed in the Introduction, was undertaken chiefly at the suggestion of Dr. Furnivall. With reference to this it may be observed that in places

where the author is following well-known sources, the summaries are intentionally briefer, and in the case of some of the Biblical stories a reference to the original has been thought sufficient.

OXFORD, 1901.

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INTRODUCTION

The _Confessio Amantis_ has been the subject both of exaggerated praise and of undue depreciation. It was the fashion of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries to set Gower side by side with Chaucer, and to represent them as the twin stars of the new English poetry, a view which, however it may be justified by consideration of their language and literary tendencies, seems to imply a very uncritical estimate of their comparative importance. Some of these references are collected below, and they serve to indicate in a general way that the author had a great literary reputation and that his book was very popular, the latter being a conclusion which is sufficiently vouched for also by the large number of manuscripts which existed, and by the three printed editions. We shall confine ourselves here to drawing attention to a few facts of special significance.

In the first place the _Confessio Amantis_ is the earliest English book which made its way beyond the limits of its own language. There exists a Spanish translation, dating apparently from the very beginning of the fifteenth century, in which reference is made also to a Portuguese version, not known to be now in existence, on which perhaps the Castilian was based. This double translation into contemporary languages of the Continent must denote that the writer’s fame was not merely insular in his life-time.

Secondly, with regard to the position of this book in the sixteenth century, the expressions used by Berthelette seem to me to imply something more than a mere formal tribute. This printer, who is especially distinguished by his interest in language, in the preface to his edition of the _Confessio Amantis_ most warmly sets forth his author as a model of pure English, contrasting his native simplicity with the extravagant affectations of style and language which were then in fashion. In fact, when we compare the style of Gower in writing of love with that which we find in some of the books which were at that time issuing from the press, we cannot help feeling that the recommendation was justified.

Again, nearly a century later a somewhat striking testimony to the position of Gower as a standard author is afforded by Ben Jonson's _English Grammar_. The syntax contains about a hundred and thirty illustrative quotations, and of these about thirty are from Gower. Chaucer is cited twenty-five times, Lydgate and Sir Thomas More each about fourteen, the other chief authorities being Norton, Jewel, Fox, Sir John Cheke and the English Bible.

Finally, our author's popularity and established position as a story-teller is decisively vouched for by the partly Shakesperian play of _Pericles_. Plots of plays were usually borrowed without acknowledgement; but here, a plot being taken from the _Confessio Amantis_, the opportunity is seized of bringing Gower himself on the stage to act as Prologue to four out of the five acts, speaking in the measure of his own octosyllabic couplet,

'To sing a song that old was sung From ashes ancient Gower is come,' &c.

The book was so well known and the author so well established in reputation, that a play evidently gained credit by connecting itself with his name.

The following are the principal references to Gower in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. The author of _The King's Quair_ dedicates his poem to the memory (or rather to the poems) of his masters Gower and Chaucer. Hoccleve calls him 'my maister Gower,'

'Whos vertu I am insufficient For to descrive.'

John Walton of Osney, the metrical translator of Boethius, writes,

'To Chaucer, that is flour of rhethorique
In english tonge and excellent poete,
This wot I wel, no thing may I do like,
Though so that I of makinge entermete;
And Gower, that so craftely doth trete
As in his book<es> of moralite,
Though I to hem in makinge am unmete,
Yit moste I schewe it forth that is in me.'

Bokenham in his _Lives of the Saints_ repeatedly speaks of Gower, Chaucer and Lydgate, the last of whom was then still living, as the three great lights of English literature. Caxton printed the _Confessio Amantis_ in 1483, and it seems to have been one of the most popular productions of his press.

In the sixteenth century Gower appears by the side of Chaucer in Dunbar's _Lament for the Makaris_ and in Lindsay's poems. Hawes in the _Pastime of Pleasure_ classes him with Chaucer and his beloved Lydgate, and Skelton introduces him as first in order of time

among the English poets who are mentioned in the _Garland of Laurel_,

‘I saw Gower that first garnysshed our Englysshe rude, And maister Chaucer,’ &c.,

a testimony which is not quite consistent with that in the _Lament for Philip Sparow_,

‘Gower’s Englysh is old
And of no value is told,
His mater is worth gold
And worthy to be enrold.’

Barclay in the Preface of his _Mirour of Good Manners_ (printed 1516) states that he has been desired by his ‘Master,’ Sir Giles Alington, to abridge and amend the _Confessio Amantis_, but has declined the task, chiefly on moral grounds. The work he says would not be suitable to his age and order (he was a priest and monk of Ely),

‘And though many passages therin be commendable,
Some processes appeare replete with wantonnes:
. . . . . .
For age it is a folly and jeopardie doubtlesse,
And able for to rayse bad name contagious,
To write, reade or commen of thing venerious.’

Leland had some glimmering perception of the difference between Chaucer and Gower in literary merit; but Bale suggests that our author was ‘alter Dantes ac Petrarcha’ (no less), adding the remark, taken perhaps from Berthelette’s preface, ‘sui temporis lucerna habebatur ad docte scribendum in lingua vulgari[A].’ In Bullein’s

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